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# **Generating positive word of mouth (WOM): An integrative and practical approach**

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A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Marketing

at  
Lincoln University  
by  
Khalid Alsulaiman

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Abstract of a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
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Generating positive word of mouth (WOM):  
An integrative and practical approach

by

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The consumer behaviour of sending positive word of mouth (WOM) messages about products to other consumers is known to have a considerable impact on the receiver's decision making and hence on the financial well-being of product providers. Therefore, marketing professionals and theoreticians have long sought to explore ways to predict and stimulate this behaviour. However, despite previous attempts made in pursuance of this goal, predicting and influencing this behaviour remains a challenge. After reviewing and discussing such attempts, this thesis proposes a new theoretical framework for the dissemination of positive WOM.

The framework adopts a new conceptualisation of this phenomenon by contextualising it into three distinct categories with each category having a different set of predictors. These categories are: dissemination of unsolicited pre-consumption positive WOM, dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM, and dissemination of solicited positive WOM. Further, the framework is posited to be applicable to the dissemination of both offline and online positive WOM. Furthermore, it is argued in the framework that salience in predicting the two unsolicited WOM category shifts from one predictor to another according to the typological congruence between a predictor and a conditioning variable. This typological congruence is based on the experiential and analytical systems of thinking.

Empirical testing covered only the prediction of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM using multiple and hierarchical regressions and self-reported data from four hundred and eight respondents. This WOM category was predicted by the two variables of exceeding

expectations and wanting to help and conditioned by three types of consumption (hedonic, utilitarian, and utilidonic). As hypothesised, it was found that in utilitarian consumption, wanting to help was a stronger predictor of the outcome variable than exceeding expectations; whereas in hedonic consumption, exceeding expectations was the stronger predictor. In utilidonic consumption however, wanting to help emerged as the stronger predictor; this was opposite to what was hypothesised. Finally, implications, both theoretical and practical and future research opportunities are identified.

**Keywords:** word of mouth, post-consumption, customer expectations, helping, re-conceptualisation, unsolicited, pre-consumption, situational, dispositional, experiential thinking, analytical thinking, hedonic, utilitarian, opinion leadership, solicited, innovation, involvement, self-enhancement, interpersonal relationships, consumption homophily.

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## List of abbreviations and symbols

Abbreviation or symbol	Definition
#	Number sign
Beta	Standardised regression coefficient (beta weight)
CLV	Customer Lifetime Value: An estimate of the net profit expected to be gained from the entire future relationship with a customer
Conative-P	A conative reaction to product-related information manifested in the intentional or actual behaviour of purchasing or consuming the product
Conative-W	A conative reaction to product-related information manifested in the intentional or actual behaviour of disseminating positive WOM messages
Exp-1	Measurement item in the exceeding-expectations scale
F	Fisher's F ratio
freq.	Frequency
Hlp-1	Measurement item in the wanting-to-help scale
MSA	Measure of sampling adequacy
N	Sample size
n/a	Not available
NZ	New Zealand
P	Probability value
PRI	Perceived relationship investment
R	Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient
$R^2$	Coefficient of determination
SEM	Structural equation modelling
SERVQUAL	Measurement scale of service quality
SPSS	Software package for statistical analysis
URL	Uniform Resource Locator (a web address)
US	The United States
VIF	The variance inflation factor: a multicollinearity measurement
WOM	Word of mouth
WW2	The Second World War

# **1 Introduction**

Within the discipline of Marketing, the consumer decision making process is viewed as the focal point of the field of consumer behaviour (Assael, Pope, Brennan, & Voges, 2007). This process involves the acquisition, processing, and evaluation of information concerning product alternatives that best satisfy the consumer's needs. Marketers aim to influence this process by collecting and analysing information about the individual consumer and their cultural and social environment, and then devise suitable marketing strategies accordingly. In addition to cultural and social factors, the consumer decision making can also be influenced by communications that take place between consumers about product options both before and after making a purchase decision. Nevertheless, this communication process, known in the marketing literature as word of mouth (WOM), is the least susceptible to marketers' influence. The current research seeks to enhance the ability of marketers to predict and influence this behaviour. The introductory chapter, first, defines WOM in general, and then specifies the WOM aspect that is the focus of this thesis. In the second section of the chapter, the importance of WOM is highlighted. In the third, the reasons that prompted this research are discussed.

## **1.1 WOM defined**

Different attempts have been made to define consumers' WOM, between which points of divergence and convergence are apparent. Westbrook (1987) defined WOM as "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers" (p. 261). In a similar vein, Anderson (1998) defined WOM as "informal communications between private parties concerning evaluations of goods and services" (p. 6). These two definitions might imply that all kinds of interpersonal communication directed at consumers can be considered WOM regardless of whether the sender is independent from the product provider or not. Therefore, these two definitions appear to be applicable to referral programmes where consumers are recruited and paid money by the product provider to spread positive WOM messages about the product. Similarly, under the definitions quoted above, reciprocal referrals where a product provider refers its customers to another provider in exchange for the second provider referring its customers to the first provider would also be regarded as WOM.

Nevertheless, the majority of WOM definitions distinguish between consumers' WOM and consumer-to-consumer communication that is motivated by commercial interests. This distinction seems fundamental because a WOM message which the consumer freely chooses to generate is something different and perhaps more important than a message that is motivated by money. Bone (1992) seemed supportive of this view when she defined WOM as "an exchange of comments, thoughts, and ideas among two or more individuals in which none of the individuals represent a marketing source" (p. 579). Similarly, Meuter, McCabe, and Curran (2013) view WOM as "any unpaid interpersonal communication between people" (p. 240). Stokes and Lomax (2002) adhered to this view by conceptualising WOM as "interpersonal communication regarding products or services where the receiver regards the communicator as impartial" (p. 350).

In one of the earliest and most cited definitions of WOM, Arndt (1967) defined this behaviour as "oral person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a brand, a product, or a service offered for sale" (p. 190). This definition clearly drew a distinction between communication that is void of commercial interests and communication that is commercially motivated. However, with the advent of the Internet and the technological advancement that came along with it, there was a need to update Arndt's definition. This was fulfilled by the definition suggested by Harrison-Walker (2001) which viewed WOM as "informal person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organisation, or a service" (p. 63). A further refinement of this definition was put forward by Lang (2010) who defined WOM as "communication between a non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a brand, a product, or a service offered for sale" (p. 33). The author proposed this modification as he saw the need for the definition to encompass WOM instances that do not necessarily occur in person such as those generated in email or text messages. This definition is adopted here to refer to WOM in general.

Within this communication process, two behaviours have been identified: disseminating WOM and requesting WOM. The former occurs when the consumer shares their evaluation of a product with other consumers, whilst the latter occurs when the consumer explicitly asks other consumers for their evaluation of the product (Buttle, 1998). Moreover, disseminating WOM is likely to be shaped by valence. A disseminated WOM message can be either positive (i.e., favourable) or negative (i.e., unfavourable) (Mazzarol, Sweeney,

&Soutar, 2007). Examples of positive WOM include the consumer expressing their favourable attitude toward a product or recommending the product to other consumers. The behaviour of disseminating positive WOM is defined here as the consumer's conveyance of their endorsement of a particular brand or product to other consumers. This particular aspect of WOM is the focus of this thesis.

## **1.2 Importance of WOM**

Marketing professionals started to pay attention to the importance of WOM as early as 1905 (Biyalogorsky, Gerstner, & Libai, 2001), and the marketing literature is replete with evidence and anecdotes on the significance of consumers' WOM behaviour. In the 1950s for example, it was found that WOM was the primary factor in motivating consumers to switch brands compared to other stimuli such as personal selling and advertisements (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). In the 1970s, it was reported that WOM had more impact on consumers' attitudes in comparison to advertisements (Day, 1971). In the 1990s, the surfing behaviour of fifty seven per cent of Internet users was driven largely by WOM recommendations (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). In the early 2000s, WOM was reported to have had an impact on two thirds of the US economy (Dye, 2000). More recently, it was found that eighty per cent of messages posted on Twitter contained news about the sender's immediate experiences (Naaman, Boase, & Lai, 2010).

The importance of WOM is attributed mainly to the credibility found in this form of communication and to its ripple effect (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Hogan, Lemon, & Libai, 2004). Information received from friends tends to be perceived as more trustworthy than information coming from commercial sources (Bristor, 1990). The latter type of information is biased and commercially motivated, whereas friends tend to be viewed as more independent. Therefore, comparative information across different product and brand alternatives is likely to be better received from friends more than from commercial sources. Additionally, a single WOM message from a single consumer has the potential of reaching and possibly having an impact on many other consumers (Hogan et al., 2004). Indeed, studies found that positive consumption experiences were reported to have resulted in consumers sending positive WOM messages to three people (Richins, 1987), to four (Collier, 1995), to five (Knauer, 1992), to six (Hart, Heskett, & Sasser, 1990) and to eight (Soderlund,

1998). These findings reveal that consumers' WOM has the potential of significantly shaping other consumers' attitude toward products or brands.

### **1.3 Research gaps**

There are two general conceptual gaps that prompted this research. These relate to 1) the difficulty of predicting and influencing consumers' generating positive WOM, and 2) the need for the development of a new theoretical framework to explain this behaviour. These two gaps are the subject of discussion in this section.

#### **1.3.1 Difficulty of predicting and influencing the generation of WOM**

Consumers' WOM has often been presented as a phenomenon that is difficult to predict and influence (Allsop, Bassett, & Hoskins, 2007; Dhillon, 2013; Lindgreen, Dobeles, & Vanhamme, 2013; Silverman, 2001). The question of how to do so more accurately is still being pondered by both academics and practitioners alike (Lovett, Peres, & Shachar, 2013). This is both a theoretical and practical question and stems from the fact that WOM is a communication process that is totally controlled by consumers (Allsop et al., 2007; Arndt, 1967; Silverman, 2001). WOM occurs in consumers' private lives. Therefore, in a WOM conversation, information is exchanged in an informal channel of communication that marketers do not have access to (Dhillon, 2013). Contrary to WOM, it is much easier to predict and influence customer-to-business interaction because the marketer is a direct member of that information exchange process (Eisingerich, Auh, & Merlo, 2014). For example, when the customer approaches the marketer with a complaint or advice, the marketer would be in a better position to analyse that interaction more closely (Eisingerich et al., 2014). As a result, marketers would be able to use that insight to predict and influence future feedback from the customer. However, in a WOM conversation, which occurs consumer-to-consumer, marketers are not likely to have that access (Dhillon, 2013). Hence, their ability to predict and influence consumers' WOM is more limited.

Moreover, the initiation and termination of WOM conversations and the content of those conversations are entirely determined by consumers. Thus, WOM has long been considered outside the sphere of marketers' direct influence. Indeed, the majority of WOM definitions and conceptualisations emphasise the importance of this phenomenon being perceived as independent from marketers (Eisingerich et al., 2014; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Lang, 2010;

Stokes & Lomax, 2002). This independence can be construed to mean that each party of a WOM conversation has to be perceived by the other party as having no financial interest in the product. The presence of any financial interest is likely to have a negative impact on the objectivity of the participants in the conversation. Consequently, such interest is likely to shift the conversation from the sphere of independent WOM to something regarded as part of a referral programme, personal selling, or public relations.

Furthermore, the difficulty of predicting and influencing consumers' WOM is exacerbated by the uncontrollable and dynamic environment in which WOM occurs. For instance, after a WOM message is propagated, there is no guarantee that the original form of the message will be maintained every time the message is passed on (Arndt, 1967). Due to this, Silverman (2001) made an analogy between consumers' WOM and a forest fire:

Like a forest fire, word of mouth is smouldering, burning, or blazing along on its own, the most powerful force in the marketplace, out of your control. You never know when it might strike, or what potential good it might do, whether it's even there, what form it's taking, or whether it's actually helping or hurting.(p. 97)

In addition, nothing can prevent an inaccurate message from being propagated to a large number of people, irrespective of the valence of that message. This happened with one of the product lines produced by Avon, the well-known cosmetics brand. The sales of one of Avon products grew dramatically after people started to recommend it to their friends as an insect repellent. This was even though the brand had never been advertised as an insect repellent prior to that independent and voluntary WOM wave (Silverman, 2001).

While WOM has traditionally been unsusceptible to marketers' influence, some argue that this has changed with the advent of the Internet and social media. The internet and social media have enhanced the ability of marketers to tap into the informal channel in which consumers' WOM takes place (Lovett et al., 2013; Yap, Soetarto, & Sweeney, 2013). By sponsoring an online discussion forum or a social networking page, marketers are able nowadays to monitor some of consumers' online WOM (Pitta & Fowler, 2005). Furthermore, social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter represent a means through which online information can be exchanged rapidly among consumers and more directly monitored by marketers (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009). Additionally, by targeting a small



subset of an online social network with a marketing message that captures the mutual interest of the whole network, that message is likely to be rapidly propagated throughout the entire network.

Nevertheless, the volume of WOM generated online is thought to be disproportionately less than that generated offline (Keller & Fay, 2012). Keller and Fay (2012) argue that ninety percent of consumers' WOM in the United States takes place offline; fourteen percent of that happens over the telephone with the remaining seventy-six percent face to face. From these figures, it can be argued that the greater part of consumers' WOM remains outside the ability of marketers to predict and influence. Moreover, this greater part of WOM takes place in consumers' private lives where it is unlikely to be observed. Consequently, self-reporting is the most used and reliable method of collecting data on WOM (Silverman, 2001). This further limits the ability of marketers' to observe and then influence and predict WOM behaviour. Consequently, the difficulty of predicting and influencing the entirety of consumers' WOM persists.

Despite the difficulty of predicting and influencing consumers' WOM, commercial and academic attempts have been made for that purpose. Some of these attempts have been criticised in the literature for being unmanageable and impractical (Lindgreen et al., 2013). The following subsections present brief descriptions of some of these techniques along with their shortcomings.

#### **1.3.1.1 Viral Marketing**

One method that has been used by marketers in an attempt to stimulate consumers to generate WOM messages is viral marketing. Viral marketing occurs when "an organisation develops an online marketing message and stimulates customers to forward this message to members of their social network" (Van der Lans, Van Bruggen, Eliashberg, & Wierenga, 2010, p. 349). Hinz, Skiera, Barrot and Becker (2011) define viral marketing as a "phenomenon by which consumers mutually share and spread marketing-relevant information, initially sent out deliberately by marketers to stimulate and capitalise on word of mouth behaviours" (p. 55). Laudon and Traver (2001) defined viral marketing as "the process of getting customers to pass along a company's marketing messages to friends, family, and colleagues" (p. 381). In other words, viral marketing refers to online marketing messages that consumers receive and then voluntarily forward to other members of their online social networks.

Previous research suggests that a marketing message must have a number of characteristics in order to become viral (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). It has been suggested that such characteristics will encourage the receiver of the message to voluntarily forward the message to other people (Godes et al., 2005; Van der Lans et al., 2010). Consequently, the message will self-propagate through online social networks in a way that is similar to a biologically infectious virus (Dobele, Toleman, & Beverland, 2005). Such characteristics include the message being attention-grabbing and interesting (Sernovitz, 2012; Van der Lans et al., 2010), unique, emotional (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & Van Wijk, 2007), arousing (Berger & Milkman, 2012), humorous, novel, sex-related, rumour-related (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011), or surprising (Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2005).

Accordingly, viral marketing could be adopted as a strategy through which consumers' WOM might be stimulated and influenced. Within this strategy, the marketer aims to exploit online social networks, which many consumers belong to, through carefully designed marketing messages. Such messages would be deliberately imbued with viral characteristics that inherently drive consumers to forward the messages to other consumers. Furthermore, some viral marketing messages would include tools such as "Share Video" or "Tell a Friend" buttons (Dobele et al., 2007; Van der Lans et al., 2010). These tools would facilitate the propagation of the message by making it easier for originators and receivers to forward the message to other members of their online social network.

Nevertheless, using viral marketing to stimulate and influence consumers' WOM has a number of shortcomings. First, a distinction could be made between the behaviour of sending WOM messages and the behaviour of forwarding marketing messages. In the former, the consumer sends a message that was originally created by the consumer or by another. In the latter however, the consumer forwards a message that was created by the marketer. In other words, WOM messages can be viewed as consumer-to-consumer (C2C) communication, whereas viral marketing can be viewed as business-to-consumer-to-consumer (B2C2C) communication (Sernovitz, 2012).

It could be argued that the mere act of forwarding an interesting marketing message can be interpreted as a tacit recommendation of the product that the message promotes. Based on this argument, forwarding a viral message and generating a WOM message would refer to the same phenomenon. However, no research has been conducted to support this

contention. It is also possible that forwarding a viral marketing message can induce the generation of a WOM message at the same time. Nevertheless, such a relationship has not been empirically investigated in the literature. Accordingly, a counterargument could also be made that forwarding a viral marketing message and generating a WOM message are two different phenomena.

Second, it has been noted in the literature that current knowledge about the efficacy of viral marketing remains inconclusive. Authors such as De Bruyn and Lilien(2004), Dobeles, et al.(2007), and Kaplan and Haenlein(2011) are of the opinion that explanations of how and why a marketing message goes viral remain limited. This ambiguity was evident in the unsuccessful viral marketing campaign launched by Starbucks in 2009. In that campaign, Starbucks placed a number of advertising billboards across different cities and challenged customers to find those billboards, take a photo of themselves in front of them, and then post the photos on Twitter. Unfortunately for the coffeehouse chain, the campaign was “hijacked” by political activists who opposed Starbucks’s labour policies. The activists took advantage of the campaign and encouraged people to take photos of themselves in front of the billboards while holding signs that denounced Starbucks’s labour policies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Furthermore, Kaplan and Haenlein(2011) called attention to the possibility of the phenomenon of viral marketing becoming obsolete in the future. They argued that, similar to previous marketing ideas such as telemarketing, consumers could overtime develop resistance to being part of such marketing campaigns.

Third, the literature suggests that viral marketing seems to be associated with the Internet in general and with social media in particular (Dobele et al., 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Indeed, the global expansion of the Internet coincided with the emergence of viral marketing in the 1990s. The term “viral marketing” was coined in an article by Rayport (1996) titled “The virus of marketing”. That was around the time that restrictions on commercial utilisation of the Internet in the United States were removed(Coffman & Odlyzko, 2002). This association between viral marketing and the Internet can be attributed to two factors. The first is the efficiency and the speed of exchanging information via the Internet. Marketing messages can be sent instantaneously to the target customers by a simple click on a button. Additionally, the viral marketing message can be expressed in different formats. For example, the message could be a simple textual message, a video, a game, or an interactive application or website (Van der Lans et al., 2010). The second factor

is the convenient availability of sizable social networks on the Internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011; Van der Lans et al., 2010), especially on social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram.

Because of this association, viral marketing could arguably be used to stimulate and influence consumers' behaviour toward generating online WOM messages. However, online WOM does not capture the entirety of consumers' WOM. Thus, this very same association could very well limit the potency of using viral marketing messages as a tool to stimulate and influence all types of consumers' WOM. As cited earlier, the percentage of WOM messages that are generated offline disproportionately exceeds those generated online (Keller & Fay, 2012). As a result, even if viral marketing is demonstrated to be an effective tool to stimulate and influence consumers' online WOM, other tools and or ideas are needed to predict and influence all types of WOM (e.g. offline WOM).

Fourth, a distinction can be made between a WOM message that is propagated before a consumption experience and a WOM message that takes place after consumption. In addition, it is logical to argue that post-consumption WOM is likely to be influenced primarily by the consumption experience; whereas pre-consumption WOM is likely to be driven by different marketing stimuli such as advertising. The beliefs that consumers develop about a product at the post-consumption stage are much more certain than the beliefs that are developed at the pre-consumption stage (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Smith & Swinyard, 1982). Post-consumption beliefs are based on the consumer's own senses. Thus, the consumer tends to attach more validity to these beliefs compared to beliefs that are based on external sources such as advertising.

As a consequence, when consumers generate positive WOM messages in the post-consumption stage, their primary goal is the provision of information to others about personal experiences. By doing so, they do not aim to gather further information from external sources about the product they have already trialled. In contrast, due to the uncertain nature of pre-consumption beliefs, generating positive WOM messages pre-consumption could be an attempt to spark a conversation through which the uncertain beliefs can be strengthened (Berger, 2014). Bearing in mind this distinction, if viral marketing is thought of as a tool to stimulate and influence consumers' WOM, then this tool is likely to be limited only to pre-consumption WOM. In other words, viral marketing is unlikely to

stimulate consumers who have already trialled the product to participate in the propagation of the viral message if their evaluation of consumption experience was not positive (Marks & Kamins, 1988). Therefore, as noted by De Angelis, Bonezzi, Peluso, Rucker, and Costabile (2012) the need for more tools and ideas to universally predict and influence the entirety of consumers WOM remains.

### **1.3.1.2 Brand pushers**

Another technique that marketers resort to in order to influence consumers' WOM is the employment of brand pushers. This technique is also known as masked marketing, undercover marketing, and shill marketing (Martin & Smith, 2008; Petty & Andrews, 2008). It involves the employment of individuals who are known as brand pushers or posers. The task of these brand pushers is to communicate to consumers a marketing message that is disguised as a genuine WOM message while hiding the commercial relationship they have with the brand they are promoting. The aim of planting these individuals is to increase the consumers' awareness of the product they are promoting and to stimulate a conversation among consumers about that product (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004; Magnini, 2011).

The practice of disguising WOM via brand pushers has long been carried out by businesses across different sectors (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004; Magnini, 2011). A few centuries ago in England, theatre companies would plant a few people in the audience and instruct them to express their approbation during and after the performance (Magnini, 2011). More recently, specialised businesses were created in the 1930s to propagate positive rumours about their clients' products and negative rumours about the competitors of their clients (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). In Hollywood and the music industry, brand pushers are often planted in public areas and given the task of starting a conversation about new movies or new music releases (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004; Magnini, 2011).

One famous example of a marketing campaign that involved the use of brand pushers was the 2002 campaign to promote one of Sony Ericson's newly released cameras. In that campaign, sixty individuals were given the task of going to different tourist attractions across the United States and posing as tourists. They were supplied with the new camera and instructed to ask other tourists to take a picture of them using this camera. They were also instructed not to voluntarily reveal their real identity. Once the target customer agrees to

snap a picture of the fake tourists, a conversation would often ensue about how the camera works and the different features it has (Martin & Smith, 2008).

This practice has been utilised by businesses in the online environment as well. In 2006, a young adult named Charlie created a blog that was called “All I want for Christmas is a PSP”. According to Charlie, who owns a Sony PlayStation Portable (PSP) unit, he created the blog in order to persuade the parents of his best friend Jeremy to buy a PSP for their son. The blog also aimed to provide a venue for young adults who found themselves in a similar situation and wanted to exchange ideas about Sony’s PSP. Ultimately however, it was revealed that the blog was actually a fake blog that was created by Sony Entertainment (Magnini, 2011).

Compared to traditional promotional techniques, using brand pushers to stimulate consumers’ WOM is more flexible and more sensitive to customers’ reactions. It is likely that brand pushers live among the target customers, and therefore they have the opportunity to effectively and efficiently identify and reach the target customers. Moreover, brand pushers have the ability to directly interact with the target customer in interpersonal conversations. Thus, they can alter the promotional message according to the specific conversation they are having with the target customer (Magnini, 2011). Moreover, consumers are empowered with services and technologies that can shield them from undesirable promotional messages (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004). For example, television advertisements can be blocked by using digital video recorders; telemarketing can be avoided through a do-not-call registry; and online advertisements can be blocked by using ad blocking software (Beard & Abernethy, 2005; Martin & Smith, 2008; Walker, 2004). Consequently, from the viewpoint of marketers, the employment of brand pushers would be one of the remaining promotional options that is convenient and potentially effective and efficient.

Nevertheless, utilising brand pushers with the aim of promoting a product and influencing consumers’ WOM has been questioned from an ethical standpoint. Kimmel and Smith (2001) suggest that the ethicality of a particular behaviour can be analysed from two perspectives; consequentialist and non-consequentialist. The former predicates the ethical judgement on the consequences of the behaviour; whereas the latter bases the ethical judgement on the nature of the behaviour. From both ethical perspectives, using brand pushers can be construed as unethical (Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998).

From the consequentialist point of view, the use of brand pushers can result in negative consequences for the consumer who is targeted with this technique. Based on what the brand pusher says, the targeted consumer might purchase or promote a product that he or she might not have purchased or promoted had the real identity of the brand pusher been disclosed. When consumers receive promotional messages, they process three types of information; information about the promoted product; about the agent who is communicating the promotional message; and about the persuasion technique that the agent is using (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The agent in this context refers to the business or the individual who initiates the promotional message (e.g., a salesperson). Information about agents would include their traits, their competency, and their goals. The persuasion technique refers to how the message is designed and delivered so as to persuade the receiver of the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Information about the promoted product is processed in order to evaluate the capability of the product to fulfil the consumer's needs. However, the consumer also needs the two other types of information in order to assess the credibility of the promotional message and in order to make an informed decision (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998).

By hiding the latter two types of information from the consumer, the consumer might become more vulnerable to the marketing message. As a result, the purchase decision that the consumer makes might not be the optimum decision (Martin & Smith, 2008). Furthermore, when the target consumer discovers the real identity of the brand pusher, the consumer is likely to be negatively affected. This negative effect might be manifested in low self-esteem, a sense of distrust of the promoted brand, a fading loyalty to the brand, or a sense of doubt about the genuineness of the conversations they encounter with people (Magnini, 2011; Martin & Smith, 2008).

From the non-consequentialist ethical viewpoint, the use of brand pushers has been considered unethical because it is inherently deceptive and intrusive. Martin and Smith (2008), this technique violates the social expectation that consumers should consent to receiving promotional messages before they are sent; or at least they should be able to opt out from receiving promotional messages. By not disclosing the commercial relationship they have with the promoted brand, brand pushers are essentially communicating a promotional message without the consent of the consumer. In addition, the technique has been described as deceptive because it involves misrepresentation and misleading omission

(Petty & Andrews, 2008). When a brand pusher talks positively about a product and disguises that as genuine WOM that is generated by a random consumer, this behaviour constitutes a misrepresentation of the truth. Also, the technique is said to involve misleading omission because brand pushers would be required not to disclose the relationship they have with the promoted brand. By doing so, the brand pusher basically tries to take advantage of the credibility that consumers often bestow upon consumer-to-consumer communication (Darke & Ritchie, 2007; Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004).

As a consequence of recognising the ethical problems noted above, independent marketing associations have introduced specific guidelines that call for more restrictions on the use of this technique. For example, the Code of Practice for Direct Marketing in New Zealand strongly advocates against misleading the consumer in marketing communications (NZ Marketing Association, 2014). The code clearly stipulates that marketing communications should not be disguised as information or news when the real aim of the communication is to sell a product. Moreover, the code stresses the importance of disclosing the identity of the agent who is conveying the marketing message. Similarly, the Word of Mouth Marketing Association, based in the United States, calls for honesty in practices that aim to stimulate consumers' WOM. Specifically, the organisation emphasises disclosure in regard to the identity of brand pushers, disclosure in regard to the relationship these brand pushers have with the brand they promote, and also disclosure in regard to the opinion they express about the brand (Magnini, 2011).

#### **1.3.1.3 Influential consumers**

Another technique that marketers use in order to influence consumers' WOM has been called the influential hypothesis in the literature (Allsop et al., 2007; Watts & Dodds, 2007). The essence of this technique is reliance on the most influential consumers in the market in order to stimulate or influence consumers' WOM (Cheung, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2007). These are a small number of individual consumers who appear to have influence over the thoughts, feelings, and purchase decisions of other consumers (Song, Chi, Hino, & Tseng, 2007). One manifestation of such influence can be the WOM messages which those influentials generate when they provide advice or recommend a product to other consumers (Li & Du, 2011). Owing to the influence and credibility of these individuals, the WOM messages they generate are likely to be propagated by a greater number of consumers (Hinz et al., 2011).



Additionally, this diffusion process is likely to be amplified when the recommended product is new to the market (Cho, Hwang, & Lee, 2012).

Different monikers have been used in the literature to refer to these influential consumers. They have been referred to as influentials (Aral & Walker, 2012), opinion leaders (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Venkatraman, 1990), mavens (Barnes & Pressey, 2012; Feick & Price, 1987; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011), innovators (Cheung et al., 2007), early adopters (Nancarrow & Nancarrow, 2007), social hubs (Libai, Muller, & Peres, 2013), and key communicators (Silvia, 2006). While these labels subsume a few nuanced distinctions between them, they nevertheless have been used interchangeably to describe influential consumers. For example, an opinion leader have been described as someone who has knowledge and expertise in a specific product category (Abratt, Nel, & Nezer, 1995). In contrast, a maven is an influential consumer who has knowledge in more than one product category (Feick & Price, 1987). Notwithstanding this subtle difference between opinion leaders and mavens, mavens have been referred to in previous research as polymorphic opinion leaders as opposed to monomorphic opinion leaders (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012; Merton, 1968).

Similarly, small differences have been identified between innovators and early adopters. Innovators are said to represent the first 2.5 per cent of the consumers who adopt a new product. Early adopters on the other hand represent the next 13.5 per cent. The remaining eighty four per cent are consumers whose decisions to adopt the new product is largely influenced by early adopters and innovators (Assael et al., 2007; Beard & Easingwood, 1996). Additionally, innovators are less likely than early adopters to adhere to the norms of social groups. Hence, innovators are described as more cosmopolitan, whereas early adopters are said to have more followers. Nonetheless, both innovators and early adopters have been referred to as opinion leaders in previous research; and both share in the characteristic of being the catalysts in terms of adopting the new product before the rest of the market (Nancarrow & Nancarrow, 2007; Wright & Charlett, 1995). Regardless of the differences mentioned above between various types of influential consumers, they are portrayed in the literature as having some commonly shared characteristics between them. These characteristics include being interested in new products (Li, Ma, Zhang, Huang, & Kinshuk, 2013), having a tendency to initiate consumption-related conversations with other

consumers (Mangold, Miller, & Brockway, 1999), and most importantly, having the ability to influence other consumers through WOM (Weimann, Tustin, Van Vuuren, & Joubert, 2007).

Marketers can make use of the influence those individual consumers have by targeting them with the right marketing stimuli. These special consumers tend to be the first targets of marketing campaigns, especially if the product is new to the market. Furthermore, proponents of this targeting technique cite both scientific and anecdotal evidence which attest to the potency of this technique. In an academic study, Libai et al.(2013) found that targeting influential consumers leads to thirty percent more profit than targeting ordinary consumers. In practice, a plethora of cases can be cited to corroborate the effectiveness of this marketing technique.

RhythmOne(2015a), a marketing company that specialises in targeting influential consumers, reported that the return of investment (ROI) which their clients received from targeting influential consumers in 2015 was \$9.60 for every one dollar invested. Two of these clients were the fast food restaurant McDonald's and the clothing and accessories retailer Gap. McDonald's utilised this technique in a promotion of their Happy Meals during back-to-school times. The influential consumers chosen in McDonald's campaign were eighteen female bloggers who had children aged six to ten years. They were instructed to use their blogs to promote McDonald's Happy Meals as a convenient option to home-cooked meals. Also, they were encouraged to provide their readers with advice on how to survive the hectic back-to-school period. Additionally, when readers interacted with their blog posts, they were entered into a draw to win a twenty dollar giveaway card from McDonald's. By the time this campaign was concluded, about 2,300 comments were made by people who read the blogs, and about 65,000 interactions were recorded (i.e., tweets and likes). Moreover, McDonald's earned \$ 4.75 for every dollar they spent to target the bloggers (RhythmOne, 2015b).

As for Gap clothing, the retailer resorted to influential consumers in order to increase people's awareness of the re-opening of one of its branches in Miami. Ten fashion bloggers between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four were chosen. They were invited to attend the re-opening event and then write in their blogs about the store and the outfits and items it sells. All the blog posts were shared through Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, and Instagram.

At the end of the campaign, the retailer received an ROI of \$3.38 for every dollar they spent on targeting the bloggers (RhythmOne, 2015b).

As can be inferred from these two examples, the targeting of influential consumers can be implemented in a number of ways. It can be done by providing those influentials with discounts or rebates which they can give to other consumers. Additionally, influentials can be targeted by providing them with free samples of the product they are supposed to promote (Berger & Schwartz, 2011; Magnini, 2011). An example of this is a marketing campaign that car manufacturer Ford ran in 2009. The campaign provided 100 bloggers with Ford Fiestas in the hope that this move would stimulate WOM about the car and increase demand for it (Libai et al., 2013). Petty and Andrews (2008) went further to suggest that in addition to providing influentials with product samples, they can also be provided with talking points that could assist them in promoting the product.

Moreover, the targeting of influential consumers can also be carried out through building a relationship with them. This approach is often adopted by public relations (PR) specialists when they interact with journalists and opinion leaders (Williams & Buttle, 2011). An example of targeting influentials through relationship building was the launch of Windows 7 in 2009. After launching the operating system that year, Microsoft held a number of parties in fourteen countries in an effort to increase awareness of the new product. Ultimately, it was estimated that around seven million people who did not attend those parties received the information that was exchanged inside the parties (Libai et al., 2013).

Similar to brand pushers, influential consumers are expected ethically, and in some countries legally, to disclose any benefits they receive for promoting products to other consumers. However, while this could be a restriction in the case of brand pushers, it is likely to be less so in the case of influential consumers. In fact, Carr and Hayes (2014) found that full disclosure of the benefits that an influential receives from the brand they promote actually increases their credibility in the eyes of their followers. As alluded to earlier, influential consumers can have an impact on others, and they are likely to be regarded as credible by their followers. These are two traits that are not necessarily required in a brand pusher. Hence, due to the influence and the credibility that the influentials accumulate, their WOM messages are likely to be affected primarily by their desire to maintain that credibility and influence (Silverman, 2001). Thus, the credibility and impact of a WOM message that was

generated by an influential consumer is less likely to be diminished by the disclosure of commercial sponsorships compared to brand pushers.

Despite the perceived advantages that can be gained by implementing the influential hypothesis, the technique has been questioned by a number of sceptics such as Berger and Milkman (2012), Cheung, et al.(2007), Watts and Dodds (2007), and Balter and Butman (2005). Iyengar, Van den Bulte, and Valente (2010) note that the influential hypothesis is predicated on three assumptions. The first of these is that social contagion occurs between consumers in terms of product adoption and information exchange. The second is that some consumers have the ability, more than others, to influence the opinions and the consumption decisions of other consumers. The third is that influential consumers can be identified and targeted. The literature is replete with evidence that lends credence to the first and third assumptions. However, critiques of the second assumption can be made.

The argument for the existence of special consumers who have disproportional influence over other consumers can be traced back to the 1940s and 50s. In that period, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) introduced their communication model of the two-step flow. In it, they argue that social influence flows from the media to the majority of society through a small intermediary group of people called opinion leaders. In other words, information and social influence go through two steps. The first is from media to opinion leaders and the second is from opinion leaders to their followers. From the 1960s till recently, this model of communication had gained much traction in the behavioural sciences (Gitlin, 1978; Roch, 2005; Van den Bulte & Joshi, 2007). Nevertheless, it should be noted that this model was proposed in an era when social media was nonexistent. Now in the age of social media, the central role that opinion leaders play in the diffusion of information and social influence ought to have diminished to some extent. This attenuation is arguably because social media has empowered ordinary individuals to communicate with many others easily and to have a large number of followers. Essentially, the prevalence of the Internet and social media has reached a point where any individual can be an influencer (Bakshy, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011).

This empowerment is evident in research findings that acknowledge the role of ordinary people in the process of social contagion. Smith, Coyle, Lightfoot, and Scott (2007) report that the likelihood of experienced and well-connected consumers generating WOM

messages is equal to that of consumers who are less experienced and less connected. Similarly, in a widely cited article, Watts and Dodds (2007) found that social contagion can be attributed to the existence of a majority of influencees more than to a minority of influentials. Additionally, Mahajan and Muller (1998) argued that there are a number of situations where certain forces within the market could prevent or hinder influential consumers from exerting influence. One of these situations is when the cost of capital is high. Waiting for the diffusion process to trickle through until it covers the majority of consumers could lengthen the payback period and increase the cost of any borrowed capital. Because the length of the payback period is related to how risky and costly an investment is, targeting the majority of consumers could save both time and money (Mahajan & Muller, 1998).

Furthermore, the identification of different types of contagion processes supports the view that non-influentials contribute largely to social contagion. Watts and Dodds(2007) distinguished between two types of diffusion occurring in a social network, which they termed local and global cascades. A local cascade targets only a few individuals and then propagates for one or two steps after that. This type of diffusion is compatible with the traditional two-step flow of communication model. A global cascade on the other hand targets many individuals and then keeps cascading until it covers all or most of the network. Thus, the size of a local cascade is likely to reflect the number of people who are immediately connected to or targeted by the initiator of the cascade whereas the size of a global cascade is extendable to the entire network (Leskovec, Adamic, & Huberman, 2007).

Watts and Dodds(2007) argued that successful contagion (i.e., a global cascade) can take place irrespective of the personal influence that some members inside the social network have. The authors likened global and local cascades to two explanations for the size of wild fire spreading across a forest. Attributing the size of the fire to a host of factors such as humidity, fuel, temperature and wind would be akin to attributing the success of a global social contagion process to the targeting of different types of consumers across the entire network. Conversely, attributing the size of the fire to the size of the tree that was burnt first or to the special characteristics of the first spark is akin to attributing a successful diffusion process to only a handful of influential consumers, as in a local cascade.

Likewise, another distinction between different types of social contagion was made by Centola and Macy(2007). The authors differentiated between what they call simple and complex contagion. In order for an individual to participate in a simple contagion through the percolation of a WOM message, it would be sufficient for that individual to have received the message from only one source. However, in order for an individual to participate in a complex contagion process, the individual would need to receive the message from more than one source. Centola and Macy (2007) attribute the difference between simple and complex contagion to people's need for reinforcement and affirmation. In some situations, a product that has just been introduced to the market can be viewed with doubt especially if not so many people are talking about it. This lack of credibility is due to people's tendency to doubt the legitimacy of innovations out of fear that these might not conform to social or group norms. As a result, some people would prefer to wait until there are a few other people talking about the innovation before they decide to join the contagion process.

In addition to the diffusion models cited above, a number of other models have been proposed in the literature that do not rely on influential consumers for diffusion (Watts & Dodds, 2007). Therefore, these diffusion models should cast doubt on how much influence influential consumers actually have. For this reason, it appears that a great level of diffusion can, in some circumstances, be stimulated by targeting the majority of consumers as opposed to targeting only few "influential" consumers.

Another problem with the strategy of targeting influential consumers for the stimulation of WOM is the macro level at which this strategy operates. The literature on opinion leadership often utilises the word diffusion as opposed to the phrase word of mouth to describe the information exchange processes that occur between consumers. One explanation for this might be that the concept of opinion leadership is viewed as a practical and convenient tool that can be used to introduce a new product to the market and increase product adoption through WOM. A general view like this one fails to give a proper focus on the intricacies of the concept of WOM dissemination. Echoing this observation is Berger and Milkman (2012), who argue that consumers' WOM can be better influenced by investigating the psychological drivers of the behaviour as opposed to assuming that influential consumers will generate positive WOM in all circumstances. While the benefits that can be gained from targeting influential consumers are acknowledged, marketers cannot rely solely on this strategy to

stimulate consumers' WOM (Allsop et al., 2007; Venkatraman, 1990). Therefore, this strategy needs to be buttressed by other means and ideas.

#### **1.3.1.4 Focus groups**

Another strategy proposed by Silverman (2001) to influence consumers' WOM is the use of focus groups. Silverman's (2001) method involves two groups of customers; customers who are enthusiastic about the product in question, and prospective customers who are sceptical. Consumers in the enthusiastic group are given the task of promoting the product to those who are sceptics; the sceptics are encouraged to oppose that promotion. Silverman (2001) argues that this method enables marketers to observe consumers' actual WOM. If the sceptics are persuaded by the enthusiasts' arguments then the marketer can use these to stimulate more WOM messages among consumers. Although this method makes the generated WOM messages observable, those sessions are not spontaneous; thus, the WOM messages that are generated in them are not an accurate reflection of consumers' WOM behaviour. The difficulty of predicting and influencing consumers' WOM behaviour still exists.

#### **1.3.2 Need for a theoretical WOM framework**

Given the review above of WOM stimulation techniques, it is argued here that there is a need for a new theoretical framework to predict and influence consumers' behaviour of generating positive WOM. The aim of this section is to lay out the theoretical justifications for a new framework. To that end, three characteristics that the new framework will have are outlined and discussed. First, the framework will refine the concept of WOM further by splitting it into multiple sub-concepts or categories. Second, it will take into account the impact of product or consumption types on WOM dissemination. Third, it will be universal in terms of online and offline WOM. Subsequently in this section, it will be shown that these three characteristics are not reflected adequately in contemporary theoretical frameworks.

Previous conceptualisations of WOM can be put into two groups. The first views the phenomenon of WOM in general as an information exchange process. This process would simultaneously involve two activities; one is the provision of information and the other is the acquisition of information (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014; Yang, Hu, Winer, Assael, & Chen, 2012). Differently, the second conceptualisation focuses on each activity separately. Thus, in

the first conceptualisation, predictors of WOM are supposed to explain the entire event of two people exchanging information. In the second conceptualisation however, there are different definitions of sending and requesting WOM and different sets of predictors for each activity. The current research advocates the second conceptualisation for two reasons. First, the conceptualisation of WOM provision and WOM acquisition as one phenomenon is lacking in terms of specificity. Following this conceptualisation, the ability to accurately predict WOM would be hindered because the concept is too broad. Second, there is already evidence in the literature suggesting that the two behaviours are driven by different psychological processes (Nyilasy, 2006).

In addition to the distinction between generating and requesting WOM, the current research calls for further refinement of the concept of WOM dissemination. Very few studies have advocated a conceptualisation of WOM dissemination at a more refined and specific level. Nevertheless, scattered remarks and hints can be found in the literature which indicate that the concept of WOM dissemination can be broken down to more than one category. For example, Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster(1998) asked their respondents to remember a WOM message they generated that was based on a specific consumption experience. This can be construed as an indication of two different categories of WOM dissemination; one that is based on a consumption experience and another that precedes a consumption experience. Similarly, Wojnicki and Godes (2008) conceptualised WOM dissemination as an instance of communication between consumers that takes place after a consumption experience. Nevertheless, the authors acknowledge the possibility that WOM could be disseminated before a consumption experience. Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004) indicated that positive WOM messages can be generated by “potential, actual, and former customers” (p. 39). This articulation indicates that some WOM researchers have envisaged the possibility of consumers generating positive WOM messages about products they have not consumed yet. A similar view can be found expressed in Larivière et al. (2013).

Dichter (1966) mentioned two types of WOM dissemination; pre-decision and post-decision. However, he did not elaborate on what this distinction entails. Moreover, not much research since Dichter’s article has been conducted to build on this typology. Nevertheless, in support of Dichter’s suggested typology, it can be argued that some predictors of WOM dissemination are likely to occur before consumption while other predictors can only occur



after. For example, an interesting advertisement about a new product could stimulate a prospective consumer to talk positively about the product without purchasing it. In this hypothetical example, interest that is stimulated by the product or by the advertisement's message would be associated with the generation of pre-consumption WOM. Conversely, a predictor like customer satisfaction cannot be associated with the behaviour of generating WOM except after consumption. Resonating with this line of thinking, Jung and Kim (2012) called for research investigating the effects of the timing of WOM.

Furthermore, empirical research has revealed a distinction between the **influence** of sought WOM and that of unsought WOM (East, Hammond, Lomax, & Robinson, 2005).

Nevertheless, previous attempts to suggest a typology that distinguishes between the **dissemination** of sought WOM and the **dissemination** of unsought WOM are few if not entirely absent. Utilising open-ended questions, Mangold et al. (1999) investigated the factors that stimulated consumers to generate WOM messages about the most recent consumption experience they had. The authors reported that half of the sample had generated WOM messages following a request from another consumer for a consumption-related advice. Similar results were reported by Mazzarol et al. (2007). Wojnicki and Godes (2008) delineated in passing between solicited and unsolicited WOM. However, they opted not to incorporate that distinction into their conceptualisation of WOM.

Nyilasy (2006) differentiated between what he calls active and passive WOM. The former refers to WOM messages which the sender initiated, whereas the latter refers to those which the sender did not necessarily initiate. A similar distinction was also made by Bristor (1990). Another conceptualisation of the behaviour of generating WOM that hints at a distinction between sought and unsought WOM was suggested by Silverman (2001). However, similar to Dichter's (1966) pre-decision and post-decision typology, not much research has been conducted to build on the typologies alluded to in Silverman (2001) and Nyilasy (2006). The current research therefore proposes a new theoretical framework in which the concept of generating WOM is split into three separate categories: generating unsolicited pre-consumption WOM, generating unsolicited post-consumption WOM, and generating solicited WOM.

Knowledge about what drives consumers to generate WOM messages is fragmented, unclear and inconsistent. For example, there is empirical evidence in the literature of a

positive relationship between WOM and new products (Rogers, 1983). A correlation between WOM and established products was also found by other studies (Bristor, 1990; Day, 1971). Moreover, it was found that WOM recommendations rely on current customers (Reichheld, 1996). Other studies report empirical evidence that WOM recommendations are more likely to be generated by new customers (East, Lomax, & Narain, 2000; Stokes, Syed, & Lomax, 2002). One explanation for some of the inconsistent findings of previous research in terms of predicting the behaviour of generating WOM might be the result of the broad conceptualisation of WOM. Thus, a refined and finer conceptualisation of WOM dissemination might help resolve those inconsistencies. It might also result in a better and more accurate prediction of the behaviour of generating WOM.

In addition to the need for a re-conceptualisation of WOM dissemination, a new theoretical framework also needs to take into account the impact of product or consumption types. Sundaram, et al (1998) argued that consumers' propensity to generate WOM could be largely explained by consumption types. However, out of the six frameworks cited in this section, only two (Dichter, 1966; Lovett et al., 2013) has alluded to the role of products or consumption types in the dissemination of WOM. Likewise, Jung and Kim (2012) report in their meta-analysis that out of the thirty articles they selected, only two focused on the relationship between product types and WOM.

Furthermore, most previous research examining consumers' WOM dissemination tended to focus on social and personal variables to predict this behaviour (Fang, Lin, Liu, & Lin, 2011; Hogan et al., 2004). The personal relationship between the sender and the receiver of a WOM message and the personality traits of a WOM sender are examples of those variables. This tendency to overlook the influence of products and consumption on the dissemination of WOM has its roots in several fields of the social science (Solomon, 1983). In marketing research, Solomon (1983) observes that the influence of products is often approached in the context of predicting and explaining consumers' purchase decision making; nevertheless, the effect of products is seldom presented as a predictor of consumers' non-purchase-related behaviour.

Despite this tendency however, few attempts have been made to emphasise the role of products and consumption types in the stimulation of consumers' WOM. In these few attempts however, scholars have used different product typologies. Two of these typologies

are the goods/services continuum (Fang et al., 2011) and to a lesser degree, the typology of products as hedonic or utilitarian (Alsulaiman, Forbes, Dean, & Cohen, 2015; Jones, Reynolds, & Arnold, 2006). The goods/services continuum approach focuses on the tangibility and intangibility of the product. A good is a tangible product that can be touched, such as a car or a book. On the other hand, a service is an intangible benefit that cannot be touched such as teaching or hairstyling (Pride et al., 2007). The typology of products as hedonic or utilitarian focuses on the pleasure and usefulness of products respectively. Hedonic refers to those values of a product that provide the consumer with fun, pleasure, or excitement. Utilitarian refers to those values of a product that provide the consumer with functional and instrumental benefits such as usefulness or practicality (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Okada, 2005).

Utilising the first typology, several scholars seem to agree on the significance of WOM messages in aiding consumers to make purchase decisions, particularly those decisions pertaining to intangible services as opposed to tangible goods (Barrot, Becker, & Meyners, 2013). Intangible services often necessitate a pre-purchase brand evaluation process that is fundamentally different to that of tangible goods (Zeithaml, 1981). This difference is attributed to a number of characteristics that are exclusive to services. The most defining of these service characteristics is intangibility (Pride et al., 2007). A university course is for example a service because the core benefits that the consumer receives (i.e., knowledge and skills) do not have a physical form, and hence, they cannot be perceived through the five senses (Silverman, 2001). Additionally, because services are usually provided by humans, the quality of the same type of service is likely to vary from consumer to consumer (Pride et al., 2007). This heterogeneity makes it difficult for service providers to provide prospective customers with warranties or guarantees (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2012; Zeithaml, 1981).

Due to the two service characteristics of intangibility and heterogeneity, the consumer's ability to make a pre-purchase evaluation of available service providers is likely to be limited. This in turn increases the perceived risk of making the purchase decision (Mazzarol et al., 2007). In contrast, the tangibility and homogeneity of a physical good make physical goods easier to evaluate before making a purchase decision (Silverman, 2001). Consequently, to compensate for their inability to make a well-grounded evaluation prior to purchase, consumers of services often resort to WOM from other consumers (Chang, Jeng, & Hamid,

2013; Gheorghe, 2012). This is why services are generally seen as natural candidates for WOM communication (Fang et al., 2011; Harrison-Walker, 2001).

Empirical evidence for this notion was reported by Murray (1991). The author found that consumers who are contemplating the purchase of a service, as opposed to a physical good, prefer to gain information about the service via WOM messages from other consumers before they make a decision. Additionally, Fang et al. (2011) found that consumers seek out WOM messages from others when they face a high-risk purchase decision. Based on this association between services and the occurrence of WOM, services have been suggested as a means by which consumers' WOM could be predicted and influenced (Fang et al., 2011). However, it should not escape one's attention that the above relationship between services and WOM pertains almost always to the behaviour of requesting WOM messages from other consumers. This specific WOM behaviour is a totally different behaviour than disseminating WOM to others.

Since the current research makes a distinction between these two WOM behaviours, and since the focus of the current research is on the latter, there is a need for a new theoretical framework that considers the influence of products and consumption on the dissemination of WOM messages. The theoretical framework proposed in the current research will utilise the two product typologies mentioned above; however, the two will play different roles. The goods/services typology will be subsumed in the prediction of solicited WOM dissemination. Alternatively, the prediction of the two other types of WOM dissemination will be hypothesised to be conditioned by the hedonic/utilitarian typology.

The third characteristic of the proposed framework pertains to the universality of it in terms of explaining both online and offline WOM dissemination. In regard to this issue, two arguments have been made in the literature. The first posits that the antecedents of online WOM dissemination are likely to be different from those predicting offline WOM dissemination (Taghizadeh, Taghipourian, & Khazaei, 2013). This view seems to be the conventional wisdom among the majority of WOM researchers. Of the six frameworks reviewed in this section, three were put forth to predict online WOM exclusively; one was proposed before the Internet era; one could be interpreted as focusing solely on offline WOM; and only one was applicable to both online and offline WOM. The second argument however posits that the antecedents of WOM dissemination are probably similar across the

two media (Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006; Keller & Fay, 2012). Lovett et al.(2013) take a middle position between the two arguments cited above. They hypothesised and reported that WOM predictors have similar effects in terms of direction across the two media; however, they argue that those effects vary in terms of strength depending on the medium. Reflecting the second argument, the current research is of the view that predictors of consumers' WOM are universal across the online and the offline spheres.

A discussion of the differences between online and offline WOM can be used to further argue for the universality of the proposed predictors in the current framework. Six differences are highlighted here; WOM richness, reach, retrievability, observability, synchronicity, and the degree of personal familiarity of the individual with the other actor in the WOM instance. First, offline WOM messages have been described as possessing a higher level of richness than online messages (Henderson & Gliding, 2004). Richness here refers to non-verbal cues such as facial expression and appearance(Dichter, 1966). Offline WOM messages are likely to be rich with such cues. Oppositely, such cues are likely to be absent in online WOM (Blazevic et al., 2013). Nevertheless, it is argued here that the difference between online and offline WOM in terms of richness is unlikely to necessitate different conceptualisations of the predictors of the behaviour of generating WOM. This is so because the premise that offline WOM messages are richer than online messages is disputable. As a consequence of websites such as YouTube and technological innovations such as Skype, people are able to communicate using non-verbal cues online. Some of these communications even take place in real time.

Second, online WOM has often been described as having a larger reach than offline WOM (Blazevic et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). A single online WOM message can be directed to a large number of people more easily than an offline WOM message. For that reason, generating an online WOM message has been dubbed in a number of studies as a one-to-many form of communication, and generating an offline WOM message as one-to-one (Lovett et al., 2013; Phelps, Lewis, Mobilio, Perry, & Raman, 2004). The wider reach of online WOM is driven largely by the widespread use of social media. In 2015, users of social media around the globe were estimated to have been around 1.96 billion. This number is expected to reach 2.44 billion by 2018. As of March 2015, Facebook had a record number of 1,415 billion active users; WhatsApp had seven hundred million; Skype and Instagram had

three hundred million each; Twitter had 288 million; Tumblr had 230 million; and Snapchat had 200 million ([www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)).

The above numbers might give the impression that online WOM ought to be more prevalent than offline WOM. Nevertheless, as reported earlier, the number of WOM messages generated or requested offline largely exceeds those taking place online (Keller & Fay, 2012). Keller and Fay (2012) argued that the widespread use of social media is due to humans' inherent social nature. In other words, humans' innate tendency to be social was not brought about because of a technological innovation. Rather, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter merely provide more opportunities for those innate tendencies to manifest themselves. More importantly, it is acknowledged here that WOM reach is an important indicator in the assessment of the aggregate impact of consumers WOM across a particular market. However, it is unlikely to be a major factor in the decision of a single consumer to generate a WOM message.

Third, when a WOM message is posted online, it is more likely than not to remain available online for later retrieval by other consumers (Berger & Iyengar, 2013; Blazevic et al., 2013). Owing to this advantage, marketers would potentially have the ability to measure and analyse consumers' online WOM in terms of both value and characteristics (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Fourth, Cheung and Lee (2012) point to the observability of online WOM. Some consumers' online WOM messages can be monitored, whereas offline WOM messages are much harder to observe (Berger, 2014). Similar to the characteristic of WOM reach, consumers' engagement in the behaviour of generating a WOM message is unlikely to hinge upon whether the message is retrievable or observable. The characteristic of observability can be helpful to consumers who are seeking advice from other consumers. Nonetheless, it is likely to be irrelevant to a consumer's decision to generate a WOM message. By the same token, WOM observability may be important to marketers and academics researching consumers' WOM. However, it is likely to be irrelevant to the person generating the WOM message. Accordingly, these three differences between online and offline WOM should not entail a separate investigation of the predictors of WOM dissemination.

Fifth, an offline WOM message is more likely to be directed to people who are familiar to the sender (Meuter et al., 2013). In contrast, an online WOM message can be "broadcasted" to

and accessed by people who might be complete strangers (Blazevic et al., 2013). Finally, offline WOM conversations are described in the literature as “synchronous”, whereas online conversations tend to be “asynchronous”(Henderson & Gliding, 2004; Lovett et al., 2013). In other words, when a WOM message is communicated offline, the response is likely to follow the message immediately. In opposition, when a WOM message is communicated online, a delay before the response is communicated back is rather expected (Berger & Iyengar, 2013). Berger and Iyengar (2013) argue that asynchronous communication allows people enough time to talk about more interesting products. In synchronous communication however, the need for an immediate reply may limit people’s ability to remember and talk about interesting products.

The effects of personal familiarity and synchronicity on the behaviour of generating WOM do not seem to be intrinsic to whether the message is being propagated offline or online. Rather, these effects seem to originate from concepts that transcend the offline-online classification. Namely, the effect of personal familiarity on WOM dissemination seems to be derived from the relationships between the sender and the receiver of the WOM message. Such relationships could take different forms in both online and offline spheres. As for the effect of synchronicity on consumers’ ability to remember and talk about interesting products, this seems to arise from the ability of the marketing stimulus, be it a product or an advertisement, to provoke the consumer’s interest and to remain active in the consumer’s evoked set. A potent marketing stimulus that is active in the consumer’s long term memory would be retrievable irrespective of the extra time that an online interaction could provide. Based on the above discussion, the theoretical framework proposed in the current research is presented as a universal one that can be applied to the generation of both online and offline positive WOM.

In light of the three characteristics outlined above, six theoretical frameworks for WOM dissemination are highlighted. Some of these cited frameworks vary in terms of their universality in explaining WOM dissemination across online and offline spheres. Some attempted to exclusively predict the dissemination of WOM, while others aimed to predict the information exchange instance that included both dissemination and receiving of WOM. Additionally, some did not take into account the effect of products or consumption types on the dissemination of WOM. These differences are described in the paragraphs below.

Dichter (1966) proposed a theoretical framework about the antecedents of WOM conversations. The author argued that the antecedents of consumers' WOM conversations fall into one or more of four types of involvement. These are involvement with the product, with the self, with the receiver, and with the message. This framework offers a relatively holistic view of WOM antecedents, and it seems to factor in the effect of products or consumption types on WOM. However, it does not provide specific constructs under each of the four involvement categories. Furthermore, much of the subsequent WOM research that cited Dichter's framework did not maintain its holistic approach. Moreover, rather than focusing specifically on the behaviour of generating WOM, this framework focuses on the general instance of two or more consumers exchanging information between each other. This would include generating WOM messages and also requesting WOM.

Sundaram et al. (1998) argued that disseminating positive WOM is motivated by four variables; altruism, product involvement, self enhancement, and a desire by the consumer to help the company. This framework seems to be comparable to Dichter's framework except for one variable. The framework of Sundaram et al. includes "helping the company" as the fourth predictor, whereas the framework of Dichter has "involvement with the WOM message". Similar to Dichter's framework, this framework does not take into account the impact of products or consumption types. However, by focusing on the behaviour of generating WOM, the framework's conceptualisation of WOM is more specific.

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) proposed eleven predictors of WOM conversations on online consumer opinion platforms. These motives are altruism, helping the company, social benefits, exerting power, advice seeking, self enhancement, economic rewards, convenience, problem-solving, expressing positive emotions, and venting negative emotions. Altruism refers to the concern that the sender of the message has for the receiver. Helping the company refers to the sender wanting to reward the company for providing a good service. Social benefits refer to the sender's sense of belonging to and integration with their social group. Exerting power refers to the collective influence consumers can leverage against the product provider through negative WOM. Advice seeking occurs when consumers start a conversation with the aim of gaining more knowledge about a product. Self enhancement refers to consumers' desire to be thought of positively by other people. Economic rewards refer to the material benefits consumers receive for generating WOM. Convenience refers to a situation where the consumer thinks that generating a negative



WOM message is more convenient than lodging a formal complaint. Problem solving refers to the behaviour of generating a negative WOM message on an online company-monitored opinion platform in the hope that platform moderators will read it and redress it. Lastly, when consumers go through a very positive or negative consumption experience, they develop a psychological imbalance. Expressing one's emotions is one way through which consumers can restore their psychological balance.

The above-noted motives of WOM make it clear that the framework of Hennig-Thurau et al. seeks to predict a WOM behaviour that is defined on a very broad level, and which includes both generating and seeking WOM and both positive and negative WOM. Also, the inclusion of economic rewards as a WOM predictor takes the outcome variable outside the independent and unpaid-for conceptualisation of WOM. Furthermore, while the framework is inclusive, the effect of product or consumption types on WOM behaviour is missing.

Palka, Pousttchi and Wiedemann (2009) proposed a theoretical framework for forwarding an online advertisement message that was received on a mobile phone. The authors synthesise thirteen variables that can affect consumers' likelihood of forwarding the communication. The framework includes variables that have been used in other frameworks. Examples of these variables include the personality-related concepts of altruism and mavenism, involvement, relationship strength between forwarder and receiver, and self enhancement. Nevertheless, the framework also introduces new variables such as consumers' attitude toward forwarding an online advertisement and the ease of forwarding the message. This framework adopts a holistic approach in terms of the range of variables included in it. However, it has a very narrow focus as it confines its scope to the behaviour of forwarding viral marketing messages on a mobile device. Furthermore, it does not factor in the effect of products or consumption types. Additionally, the framework cannot be generalisable to the offline sphere. This latter shortcoming is probably the result of the framework's narrow focus.

Cheung and Lee (2012) suggested a theoretical framework for the generation of online WOM messages. This framework includes five predictors: egoism, collectivism, altruism, principledism and knowledge self-efficacy. Egoistic WOM refers to WOM messages that consumers generate in order to benefit themselves. Egoistic benefits might relate to the sender's reputation, or they might materialise in the form of prizes or money. Collectivist WOM refers

to messages which consumers generate in order to benefit the group they belong to or identify with. When consumers generate WOM for collectivism, they are trying to assert their social identity and gain a sense of belonging to the group. Altruistic WOM relates to WOM messages that are generated for the benefit of the receiver of the message. In this case, the sender of the message does not expect any direct rewards for generating the message. Rather, the message is generated out of empathy toward the receiver of the message. Principlist WOM describes WOM that is generated to uphold a general or moral principle such as justice. Additionally, consumers would generate WOM messages when they believe that they have the necessary knowledge and expertise. The authors label this fifth predictor as knowledge self-efficacy. Similar to the framework of Palka et al.(2009), the framework of Cheung and Lee (2012) limits its focus to the online sphere. Also, the effect of product or consumption types is not taken into account.

Another recent theoretical framework emphasising the dissemination of WOM was proposed by Lovett et al (2013). This framework focuses exclusively on the behaviour of generating WOM. It specifically investigates the relationships between thirteen different brand characteristics and the behaviour of generating WOM. The authors argue that because of people's need for self enhancement, the higher the quality and luxuriousness of the brand, the more WOM consumers will generate about it. Similarly, because of people's need for uniqueness, the more differentiated a brand is, the more WOM consumers will generate about it. Also, they argue that more visible brands should result in more WOM because this ubiquity facilitates people's desire to converse with each other. By the same token, the higher the number of consumers who consider a particular brand relevant to them, the more likely that brand will be the subject of people's conversations. The above three brand characteristics are called social drivers in the framework.

Another group of brand characteristics contains emotional drivers of WOM dissemination; satisfaction and excitement. It is argued that some brands tend to be associated with extreme levels of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction as opposed to moderate levels. Those brands at the extremes are likely to stimulate more consumers' WOM. A third group of brand characteristics contains what the authors call functional drivers of WOM dissemination. Within this conceptualisation, it is argued that newer brands are associated with more WOM compared to older brands. The authors also argue that more WOM is likely to be generated about brands that are complex. In addition, they argue that services receive

more WOM than physical goods. Lastly within this group, it is argued that the more knowledge a consumer has about a particular brand, the more WOM they will generate about that brand (Lovett et al., 2013).

In addition to the three groups of predictors outlined above, Lovett et al. (2013) also argue that consumers are likely to seek WOM messages and advice from other consumers when the product in question is considered risky or is a high involvement product. This framework is one of the few attempts that have been made to investigate the impact of products or consumption types on consumers' decision to generate WOM messages. Also, the framework is universal in the sense that it covers both online and offline WOM. However, it is evident that the concept of WOM which the framework seeks to predict is rather broad. Specifically, some variables in the framework predict the behaviour of generating WOM whereas others predict the behaviour of requesting WOM. Furthermore, the framework does not take into account some theoretically important concepts such as the interpersonal relationship between the sender and the receiver of the WOM message. The six theoretical frameworks reviewed above are summarised in Table 1.1.

*Table 1.1 Summary of selected theoretical frameworks for WOM from the literature*

<b>Study</b>	<b>Predicted Behaviour</b>	<b>Effect of products or consumption types</b>	<b>Universality (online - offline)</b>
Dichter (1966)	WOM dissemination & WOM request	Effect of pleasurable experiences	Offline WOM
Sundaram et al. (1998)	WOM dissemination	Not included	Offline WOM
Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004)	WOM dissemination & WOM request	Not included	Online WOM
Palka et al. (2009)	Forwarding a viral marketing message	Not included	Online WOM
Cheung and Lee (2012)	WOM dissemination	Not included	Online WOM
Lovett et al. (2013)	WOM dissemination & WOM request	Effect of brand characteristics	Offline WOM Online WOM

As a result of identifying the above noted gaps in previous frameworks, there is a need to develop a new theoretical framework to explain the behaviour of generating WOM. Such a framework should incorporate a new and more refined conceptualisation of this behaviour;

incorporate the effect of different consumption types; and be universal in terms of offline and online WOM.

## **2 Literature Review**

Chapter One of this thesis explained why there is a need for a new theoretical framework of WOM dissemination. Prior to developing this framework, it is essential to have an understanding of the building blocks of this framework. These are concepts that have been utilised in previous research to predict or explain positive WOM dissemination, and also new concepts which the current research seeks to bring into the picture such as hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption. This understanding would aid in the development of the framework in terms of determining which concepts to include or exclude and what roles they play. To explain the behaviour of generating positive WOM, different concepts have been used in previous research, and some of these concepts have been presented in different roles such as correlates, antecedents, causes, and moderators. This chapter contains a literature review about ten of these concepts. Of these ten, seven are utilised in the theoretical framework that is later proposed in the subsequent chapter. The remaining three concepts are not incorporated into the framework. However, they are acknowledged and discussed.

### **2.1 Consumer involvement**

One of the concepts that has been utilised in the prediction of consumers' WOM is that of consumer involvement. Within the consumer behaviour discipline, there seems to be a consensus that the term involvement refers to the personal relevance and importance that consumers attach to an object (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Ratchford, 1987; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Zaichkowsky (1985) notes that the personally-relevant object with which a consumer is involved could be a product, an advertisement, or a purchase decision. Because of this variability, several conceptualisations of consumer involvement have been put forth in the literature.

One of the earliest and widely cited conceptualisation of consumer involvement was proposed by Houston and Rothschild (1978). The authors divided the concept of involvement into two types; enduring and situational. Enduring refers to an ongoing involvement with and an interest in a product category. This ongoing involvement is not evoked by a specific situation. On the other hand, situational involvement refers to the importance that a consumer temporarily attaches to a product in a particular situation.

Examples of such a situation include making a purchase decision or seeking to replace a product (Taylor, Strutton, & Thompson, 2012). Expressed differently by Houston and Rothschild(1978), enduring involvement is internal to consumers whereas situational involvement is external. Thus, once the specific situation ceases to exist, situational involvement dissipates. However, enduring involvement tends to be maintained at a relatively constant level over time (Taylor et al., 2012).

Houston and Rothschild(1978) argue that consumers are likely to develop a state of enduring involvement when they accumulate experience about a product category, and when the product category becomes relevant to the consumers' ego. On the other hand, situational involvement is often the result of two types of stimuli. The first stimulus is product-related, including factors such as the complexity of a particular product and the cost and time associated with purchasing that product. The second pertains to the social circumstances in which the product is purchased or consumed (e.g. visibility of the product or gift giving). The authors argue that the higher the levels of these two types of stimuli, the more likely that the consumer will be situationally involved with purchasing a particular product.

In resemblance to the enduring/situational typology of involvement, Mittal and Lee(1989) distinguished between product involvement and brand decision involvement. Consumers experience product involvement when they become interested in a particular product category. Alternatively, a brand decision involvement occurs when consumers take an interest in selecting a particular brand. The authors argue that each type of involvement stem from three types of goals; a sign-value goal, a hedonic goal, and a utilitarian goal. A sign value goal refers to one's self-concept. This goal can be achieved by being an expert in a particular product category (i.e.,demonstrating product involvement), and also by consuming a particular brand (i.e.,indicating brand decision involvement). A hedonic goal pertains to the sense of pleasure and affect a consumer derives from a consumption-related experience. Some product categories are considered hedonic in nature; whereas in other product categories, the hedonic value is associated more with a particular brand as opposed to the product category. A utilitarian goal identifies the functional benefits consumers gain or forgo when they go through a consumption experience. This encompasses the utility gained from consuming the product and also any risks associated with selecting a certain brand over another (Mittal & Lee, 1989).

In terms of consumers' involvement with advertising messages, a number of distinctions have been made; two are cited here. Batra and Ray (1983) distinguish between product class involvement and message response involvement. Their conceptualisation of the former is consistent with the concept of enduring involvement of Houston and Rothschild (1978) and with the concept of product involvement of Mittal and Lee (1989). They define the latter as the amount of attention and mental effort a consumer allocates to the processing of a particular advertising message. With such a definition, the authors further argue that message response involvement can only be situational. This points to the similarity between message involvement and situational involvement.

Baker and Lutz (1988) proposed another typology of consumer involvement with advertising messages that is more specific. The authors differentiate between advertising-message involvement and advertising-execution involvement. The first type of involvement refers to the cognitive effort that the consumer expends in processing the content of an advertising message. The second type of involvement is an indicator of the cognitive effort expended by the consumer in order to process how the ad is designed and executed in isolation of the actual message that the ad is seeking to get across (Baker & Lutz, 1988; Lantos & Craton, 2012). The second type encompasses executional properties of the ad such as music, illustrations, the background (Yoon, Bolls, & Muehling, 1999), characters, voiceover, and storyline (Lantos & Craton, 2012). A similar distinction has been made between claim and non-claim components of an advertisement (Yoon et al., 1999). The claim components of an advertisement represent its main message, whereas the non-claim components represent its contextual and executional properties.

It can be said that the effect of consumer involvement on WOM dissemination has been theorised and empirically tested in the context of two streams of research. In the first, the context in which the relationship is investigated occurs shortly after the WOM sender engages in a consumption or purchasing experience. In the second, the relationship is investigated regardless of how proximate in time the sending of the WOM message is to a consumption or purchasing experience. Within the first stream, the concept of consumer involvement is often presented as a moderator. In a conceptual paper, Blazevic et al. (2013) argue that involvement moderates the relationship between a favourable product experience and the consumer's intention to generate positive WOM messages. The authors, concurring with Sundaram et al. (1998) and Dichter (1966), argue that a positive product

experience is likely to result in a heightened sense of excitement when the consumer has a high level of involvement with the product. Consequently, WOM is utilised as a means to ease out that excitement. This proposition was empirically supported by Wangenheim and Bayon (2007) who found that the relationship between consumers' satisfaction and WOM is moderated by consumer involvement.

Nevertheless, the relationship between consumer involvement and WOM dissemination has mostly been studied independently of the recency or imminence of the sender's consumption or purchasing incident. Within this research stream, the concept of involvement has mostly been presented as an antecedent to generating WOM. Taylor, et al. (2012) found that enduring involvement has a positive relationship with the likelihood of consumers sharing an online advertisement. Dholakia (2001) found a positive relationship between enduring involvement and the propensity to generate WOM messages. Richins and Root-Shaffer (1988) reported a positive relationship between enduring involvement and consumers' tendency to talk about new products. They also reported a positive relationship between enduring involvement and consumers' tendency to give advice to other consumers. Likewise, Venkatraman (1990) found a positive link between enduring involvement and consumers' WOM. The construct of WOM in Venkatraman's study was labelled "information sharing", measuring both the behaviours of sending and requesting WOM.

Most of the logical arguments that are suggested to explain the above cited positive relationships stem from the opinion leadership literature. Dholakia (2001) cites self-verification theory to explain why opinion leaders, who are by definition enduringly involved consumers, would generate WOM messages. Enduring involvement with a particular product category enables the consumer to gain knowledge and expertise that other less involved consumers do not possess (Venkatraman, 1990). Generating WOM messages about a particular product category serves as a means first to give indications about the consumer's self concept and what the consumer is interested in (Taylor et al., 2012), and second, to demonstrate one's knowledge and expertise in front of others (Dholakia, 2001).

Notwithstanding the positive relationships cited above, other studies have reported no relationship between consumer involvement and WOM dissemination. In a study about consumers' online WOM in the music industry, Sun, Youn, Wu, and Kuntaraporn (2006) reported no effect of consumer involvement on any information sharing behaviour. Lovett et



al. (2013) also did not find a significant relationship between consumer involvement and WOM dissemination.

## **2.2 Customer satisfaction**

Another variable that has been utilised in previous research to predict WOM dissemination is customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is regarded as an important post-consumption concept by both academics and marketing professionals. The concept is important because research has demonstrated that it is correlated with a number of other important variables (Batson & Shaw, 1991; Eisingerich et al., 2014). These include customer retention (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996), the willingness of consumers to pay premium prices (Homburg, Wieseke, & Hoyer, 2009), WOM dissemination (Bone, 1995), and financial well-being of companies (Morgan & Rego, 2006). Therefore, the concept of customer satisfaction is often a primary feature in corporate strategies (Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Mazzarol et al., 2007). Furthermore, Morgan, Anderson, and Mittal (2005) have reported that out of the 37 companies they sampled in their research, twenty seven had a formal process in place for the purpose of collecting data on customer satisfaction on a regular basis.

A positive relationship between customer satisfaction and the behaviour of generating WOM has been found by multiple authors. Holmes and Lett (1977) reported that female heads of households in the US who had a favourable attitude toward a particular coffee brand post-consumption were more likely to engage in conversations about that brand. Also, compared to those with a less favourable attitude toward the brand, female consumers were more inclined to have those conversations with a greater number of people. Using a sample of new car buyers in the United States, Swan and Oliver (1989) documented a positive relationship between satisfaction and WOM dissemination. They found that as the buyers' satisfaction with the car increased, the WOM messages they generated became more positive. Additionally, the higher consumers' level of satisfaction, the more likely they would recommend the car dealer from where they bought the automobile. In a similar way, Brown, Barry, Dacin, and Gunst (2005) investigated the satisfaction-WOM relationship using a sample of customers of a car dealership in the United States. They found that consumers' intentional and actual WOM increases when satisfaction with the car and with the dealership increases. Additionally, they reported that the association between satisfaction

with the dealership and WOM dissemination is stronger than the association between satisfaction with the car and WOM dissemination.

Likewise, Selnes (1993) found a positive relationship between satisfaction and loyalty among customers of four very different sorts of organisations; a business college, a life insurance company, a telephone company, and a supplier of fish feed. In that study, consumers' intentions to generate positive WOM is conceptualised as a measurement item in the loyalty scale. This scale also included another item that measured the likelihood of consumers buying the same product again. Soderlund (1998) divided the sample in his research into two groups and presented each with a hypothetical scenario. The first scenario narrated a situation where respondents faced an unsatisfactory service recovery; whereas the other presented a satisfactory service recovery. In the latter scenario, a strong positive correlation was found between satisfaction and generating WOM.

Reynolds and Beatty (1999) examined the relationship between customer satisfaction and WOM dissemination in the fashion and clothing sectors in the United States. They specifically focused on customers who had an ongoing relationship with a salesperson of the clothing store. The authors found a positive correlation between customers' satisfaction with the relationship they had with the salesperson and how frequently they told other consumers about it. Additionally, they found that consumers' proclivity to generate WOM messages about the clothing store was positively correlated with satisfaction with the store. However, the latter correlation was not significant. In the consumer electronics market, Heitmann, Lehmann, and Herrmann (2007) found strong and positive correlations between the satisfaction of consumers and the number of WOM messages they generated; and between the satisfaction of consumers and their willingness to recommend.

Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler (2002) investigated the relationship between customer satisfaction and WOM in the services sector. They divided their sample into three groups. Consumers in the first group were required to choose a service they bought in the past that had high levels of customisation and interaction between the service provider and the customer. Those in the second group were required to choose a service they bought in the past that had a lesser degree of customisation and interaction. The third group was required to select a standardised service that had a low level of interaction. The authors utilised this service taxonomy in order to achieve generalisability across different service

sectors. They found that satisfaction had a strong and significant positive impact on consumers' behaviour of recommending the service provider to other consumers.

Furthermore, the findings cited above have been corroborated in different cultures. Shemwell, Yavas, and Bilgin (1998) found a strong positive relationship between the satisfaction of Turkish customers with primary care physicians and the customers' tendency to recommend the physician to other consumers. Chaniotakis and Lymperopoulos (2009) found that Greek women who have recently given birth and were satisfied with their maternity care were more likely to recommend the service provider to their relatives and friends. In the tourism industry, Prebensen, Skallerud, and Chen (2010) reported a positive relationship between the satisfaction of Norwegian tourists and their intentions to recommend tourist destinations to others.

Logical arguments as expressed in theory have been used to explain the positive association between satisfaction and generating favourable WOM. Three of these are reviewed here; Social Exchange Theory, Perceived Relationship Investment Theory, and the Equity theory. As explained by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), in order for any exchange process to occur, there has to be a situation of interdependence between at least two parties. In this situation of interdependence, the outcomes of the exchange hinge on the efforts of the parties in the exchange. Contrary to this are situations where there is either total independence or total dependence. In these two situations, outcomes are brought about as a result of the effort of only one party.

One of the pioneering founders of the Social Exchange Theory, Blau (1964) argued that a social exchange should be distinguished from an economic exchange. In economic exchange, parties of the exchange expect each other to fulfil certain tasks and obligations. Such tasks are likely to be explicit and detailed; and therefore, these tasks may be negotiated and legally enforced. The exchange process that takes place between a consumer and a seller is an example of an interdependent economic exchange. The seller is expected to supply something of value to the consumer, and the consumer is expected to compensate the seller monetarily for that provision. In a social exchange however, parties of the exchange engage in voluntary and unspecified tasks whose nature is determined by and at the discretion of the exchange parties separately (Blau, 1964). Accordingly, tasks in a social exchange process

are not the subject of bargaining or negotiation and are unlikely to be legally enforced (Bettencourt, 1997; Blau, 1964).

Social Exchange Theory posits that when one exchange party initiates an action that is favourable to the other party beyond the economic obligations specified in the exchange agreement, the receiving party has an implicit obligation to reciprocate (Bettencourt, 1997; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The theory seems to be in agreement with the maxim that Becker (1990) put forth to describe humans' disposition to reciprocate: "we should return good for good in proportion to what we receive" (p. 4). For example, when a service provider includes an extra service free of charge, this generates the obligation in the consumer to reciprocate by generating positive WOM or by offering the service provider feedback and suggestions (Bagozzi, 1995). In view of that, and contrary to the legal enforcement available in economic exchanges, initiating social exchange is a way to stimulate cooperation and trust between exchange parties (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Additionally, Bagozzi (1995) argued that reciprocity in a social exchange situation has societal and individual benefits. Socially, it creates harmony and fellowship. Individually, it bolsters people's self-concept and makes them more predictable. At the individual level, reciprocity helps reduce the guilt which individuals might feel if they do not reciprocate a goodwill gesture.

Another theory that has been invoked to explain the link between satisfaction and WOM dissemination is the Perceived Relationship Investment (PRI) Theory. De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, and Iacobucci (2001) define the PRI Theory as a consumer's perception of how much a company dedicates irretrievable resources, efforts, and attention to sustain or improve their relationships with customers. Bearing resemblance to the social exchange theory, the PRI Theory also employs the principle of reciprocity. It argues that when a company develops its resources toward building and maintaining a relationship with the customer, the customer develops a good impression about the company and a psychological bond with it. Most importantly, the investment engenders a need in the customer to reciprocate. Generating positive WOM messages is one likely way by which consumers can reciprocate a company's favourable treatment and attention.

As theorised by De Wulf et al. (2001) and De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, and Van Kenhove (2003), consumers' perceptions about the relationship they have with the company can be influenced in a number of ways. Loyal customers can be offered special prices, gifts, or

discounts. Also, the communications that a company has with loyal customers can be conducted in a personalised way. This encompasses addressing the customer by name and being familiar with their personal needs and preferences. This customised communication would indicate to the customer their special status with the company, and it could create a feeling of friendship between the two parties. Additionally, the communications between a company and its loyal customers can be carried out on a regular basis. This could lead to the cultivation of trust and enhanced closeness between the two parties. PRI Theory argues that implementing such tactics enhances customers' perceptions about how much the company has invested of its resources to build a relationship with them. This perception in turn would encourage customers to reciprocate by voluntarily engaging in behaviours that are beneficial to the company such as generating positive WOM (Liang & Wang, 2007; Van Vaerenbergh, Larivière, & Vermeir, 2012).

Similarly, Maxham(2001) cited Equity Theory as a rationale for the positive link between satisfaction and generating WOM. Equity Theory posits that parties to an exchange will evaluate the fairness of the exchange by conducting two sets of comparisons. First, they compare the investment or sacrifices they made to the other party with the rewards they gained from that party. The expended investments are referred to as the input to the exchange and the gained rewards are referred to as the output. The second comparison is between the ratio of output-to-input of party A and the ratio of output-to-input of party B. If the ratio of output-to-input of party A is larger than the ratio of output-to-input of party B, then a situation of inequity and injustice exists (Cengiz, Er, & Kurtaran, 2007). When the customer is the one with the larger ratio, the customer might develop feelings of guilt or regret. In this situation, the customer might resort to generating positive WOM messages in order to be fair to the other exchange party (i.e., the product provider). On the other hand, if the product provider is the one with the larger ratio, then the customer might develop feelings of anger and frustration. In this case, the customer might decide to resort to generating negative WOM in order to make the exchange more equitable.

Despite the corroborated evidence of a positive association between satisfaction and WOM dissemination, previous conceptualisations of customer satisfaction are not without variations and shortcomings (Chang & Polonsky, 2012; Giese & Cote, 2002). These long-standing inconsistencies had even led one of the experts in the field of customer satisfaction to opine that "everyone knows what satisfaction is until asked to give a definition, then it

seems nobody knows” (Oliver, 1997, p. 13). In agreement with this quote, a lack of standardisation in contemporary definitions of customer satisfaction as a concept has been noted in the literature (Peterson & Wilson, 1992). Giese and Cote (2002) go a step further and observe that in some satisfaction studies, a definition of the concept is not even provided.

Variation in the conceptualisation of customer satisfaction can be viewed from two perspectives. One perspective pertains to the breadth of the concept. Under this perspective, two conceptualisations of customer satisfaction have been suggested; transaction-specific and cumulative (Johnson, Anderson, & Fornell, 1995). The transaction-specific conceptualisation focuses on customers’ transient satisfaction with a single purchase or consumption experience (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Oliver, 1977). The cumulative view of satisfaction pertains to the overall evaluation of all past experiences with a particular product or brand (Anderson, 1994; Fornell, 1992).

The other perspective through which satisfaction is conceptualised inconsistently is the view of the concept as a response to an evaluation process. This conceptualisation, known as the disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1977, 1980), has been cited widely in satisfaction research (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013). According to this paradigm, satisfaction is an evaluative judgement that occurs as a response to a comparison between a pre-consumption comparison standard (e.g., expectations of what a product will deliver) and the actual consumption experience. Resultantly, the degree to which a customer is satisfied or dissatisfied pivots on the extent by which the actual consumption experience is above or below the pre-consumption comparison standard (Tse & Wilton, 1988). If the experience exceeds the standard, the standard is said to be positively disconfirmed and the customer is satisfied. If the actual experience fails to meet the comparison standard, the standard is said to be negatively disconfirmed and the customer is rendered dissatisfied. If the experience only meets the standard, then the standard is confirmed and the customer feels indifferent (Oliver, 1989; Schmitt, 2003; Woodruff, Cadotte, & Jenkins, 1983).

A slightly different postulation of the relationship between the satisfaction response and the comparison standard was however offered by Oliver (1997). In it, if the actual experience only meets the comparison standard, then the standard is confirmed and the customer is satisfied. If the experience fails to meet the standard, the standard is negatively

disconfirmed and the customer is rendered dissatisfied. If the experience exceeds the standard, the standard is positively disconfirmed and the customer is delighted.

Despite the prevalence of the disconfirmation paradigm, variations and shortcomings within it can be identified. First, the argument that satisfaction is a function of positive disconfirmation has been empirically challenged in a number of studies. Churchill and Surprenant (1982) ran an experiment to investigate the effect of disconfirmation on customers' satisfaction using two products; household plants and video disc players (VDP). While the authors found a causal link between disconfirmation and satisfaction in the plant group, no such link was detected in the VDP group. Rather, the authors found that satisfaction was caused directly by the product's performance irrespective of whether the pre-purchase comparison standard was disconfirmed or not. This finding led Churchill and Surprenant(1982) to conclude that disconfirmation leads to satisfaction when the consumed product is non-durable.

A further trace of evidence of the pre-eminence of performance over disconfirmation in driving customer satisfaction can also be found in Cronin and Taylor (1992). The authors found satisfaction to be positively related to service quality in four industries; fast food, pest control, banking, and dry cleaning. Nevertheless, in their measurement of service quality, they collected data about customers' expectations regarding specific quality dimensions; data about the performance of the service provider on those dimensions; and data about how important those quality dimensions were to them. The authors then used four different ways to calculate the composite measure of quality. The first calculation follows the disconfirmation paradigm in which quality is viewed as the difference between actual performance and expectations. The second conceives of quality as performance minus expectations multiplied by importance. The third measures quality in terms of performance only. In the fourth, quality is the product of multiplying performance by importance. The authors reported that the performance-only measurement was the best in explaining variation in the concept of service quality.

In a seminal article that focuses solely on the definition of customer satisfaction, Giese and Cote (2002) conducted group and individual interviews in which consumers' opinions on the definition of satisfaction were collected. In group interviews, a total of one hundred and thirty-five consumers generated a total of two hundred and seventy-four comments. Of the

two hundred and seventy-four comments, only about ten (6.2%) expressed the opinion that the definition of satisfaction should focus on expectations (i.e., a comparison standard). The majority of comments emphasised other aspects such as product benefits (one hundred and thirty-nine comments, 50.7%) and the salespeople (one hundred and thirty-one comments, 47.8%).

The second shortcoming of the disconfirmation paradigm is that satisfaction and some of the processes and concepts involved in its formation encompass a myriad of different meanings. The pre-consumption comparison standard could refer to the expectations that the consumer has concerning an imminent consumption experience. In other words, an expectations-based comparison standard represents how good the product *will probably be* (Tse & Wilton, 1988). This type of comparison standard is used widely in satisfaction studies.

Alternatively, the comparison standard could also focus on the fairness of the exchange process, the outcome of which is the consumed product or the benefits that the consumer receives. This fairness is often determined by comparing the investment which the consumer expends in an exchange transaction with the benefits they receive. Additionally, consumers can determine the fairness of the exchange transaction by comparing the benefits they gained from the exchange to the benefits other consumers gained in similar situations (Hom, 2000). An equity-based comparison standard reflects what the consumer *should* receive in proportion to the investment or effort made by the consumer (Tse & Wilton, 1988). Moreover, the pre-consumption comparison standard could be based on what an ideal consumption experience is (Tse & Wilton, 1988). In other words, this standard represents what an imminent consumption experience *can optimally be*.

The different versions of the comparison standard discussed above can be predicated on past consumption experiences, received WOM messages, or exposure to advertisements (Tse & Wilton, 1988). These versions have for the most part been investigated individually. However, some researchers have argued that the process of forming a satisfaction response may involve more than one comparison standard simultaneously (Forbes, Tse, & Taylor, 1986).

More importantly though, different meanings have also been given to the satisfaction response itself. While most studies present the concept of satisfaction as an emotional



response (Giese & Cote, 2002; Halstead, Hartman, & Schmidt, 1994; Lovett et al., 2013), other studies portray the concept as a cognitive response (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Tse & Wilton, 1988). Yet, other studies view the satisfaction response as a mix of both cognition and emotion (Fournier & Mick, 1999; Oliver, 1997).

Furthermore, among the studies that view satisfaction as emotional in nature, Oliver (1989) presents different types of the satisfaction response. They are satisfaction-as-contentment, satisfaction-as-pleasure, satisfaction-as-relief, satisfaction-as-novelty, and satisfaction-as-surprise. The author argues that satisfaction-as-contentment is likely to occur with durable goods, repeat purchases, or non-emotional products. Consumers with this type of satisfaction have a low level of arousal and they may have an attitude of disinterest or indifference. Thus, disconfirming the pre-comparison standard becomes hardly possible. As a result, acceptance and contentment is the likely response.

Satisfaction-as-pleasure is characterised by high levels of arousal and interest. Therefore, consumers under this mode of satisfaction are likely to experience happiness in the case of positive disconfirmation. Satisfaction-as-relief is likely to occur with products such as painkillers or a customer complaint that is handled favourably. This mode refers to the emotional state of relief and catharsis which consumers feel after an unpleasant situation they were in has been resolved to their satisfaction. Oliver (1989) distinguishes between satisfaction-as-pleasure and satisfaction-as-relief in terms of how these states last. In the case of the former, consumers will likely seek to reinforce and extend the state of pleasure that they experience, and hence their satisfaction would last longer. In the latter case however, satisfaction is likely to fade soon after its formation because that satisfactory relief could bring memories of the unpleasant experience that preceded it.

Satisfaction-as-novelty could occur after a consumption experience which the consumer has not engaged in before. In such a situation, the comparison standard is not defined by the consumer prior to consumption. Hence, disconfirmation in this case becomes unrealisable. Consumers with this satisfaction response are likely to be interested in the novel product if they are in a state of low arousal; and are likely to be excited about the product under high arousal. Oliver's (1989) sixth mode of satisfaction is called satisfaction-as-surprise. Here, the consumer starts the consumption experience with a well-defined comparison standard. Consumers under this type of satisfaction are likely to experience a high level of arousal. As a

result, when the comparison standard is positively confirmed, consumers are likely to feel delighted. Satisfaction-as-pleasure seems to exhibit a resemblance to Satisfaction-as-surprise. However, the difference between the two is that in satisfaction-as-pleasure, a positive disconfirmation of the comparison standard is thought by the customer to be plausible but infrequent, whereas in satisfaction-as-surprise, a positive disconfirmation is thought by the customer to be very unlikely to occur (Oliver, 1989).

Building on Oliver's (1989) paper, Fournier and Mick (1999) argue for additional variations of the satisfaction response. They introduce satisfaction-as-helplessness and satisfaction-as-love. The former refers to a situation where the consumer is unable to switch to another brand; whereas the latter refers to an emotional relationship that the consumer develops with the product or brand. The authors suggest that satisfaction-as-love can be manifested in five feelings; passion for the product, feelings of uniqueness as a result of using the product, a desire to always keep the product intact and in good condition, obsessive attachment to the product, and a feeling that the product expresses the consumer's self-concept to others.

It is evident from the above review of the satisfaction literature that different consumers have different meanings for satisfaction. Additionally, these different meanings depend on the individual consumer, on the consumption situation, and on the consumed product. Based on that, the cogency of using satisfaction as a predictor of consumers' WOM dissemination can be disputed.

## **2.3 Wanting to help**

Another predictor of WOM dissemination that has been argued for is consumers' willingness to voluntarily help other consumers make consumption or purchasing decisions. Different terms have been suggested to label this variable, such as altruism (Hars & Ou, 2002; Palka et al., 2009; Price, Feick, & Guskey, 1995), enjoyment of/in helping other consumers (Cheung & Lee, 2012; Tong, Wang, & Teo, 2007), and concern for other consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Yap et al., 2013). Mazzarol et al.(2007) count consumers' desire to help other consumers as a WOM predictor that has been argued for frequently in the literature.

Hennig-Thurau et al.(2004) found consumers' concern for other consumers to have a positive effect on the number of comments they post on online platforms in Germany. These

platforms are websites via which consumers interact, form online communities, and exchange views and opinions about their consumption activities. Tong et al.(2007) investigated the effect of six predictors on consumers' intentions to post an online review about their mobile phone consumption experience. One of these predictors is consumers' desire to help other consumers. This predictor was found to have the strongest effect in the model. Similarly, Cheung and Lee (2012) proposed another six-predictor model to predict the intentions of consumers in Hong Kong to post online reviews about their consumption experiences at restaurants. Enjoyment of helping was one of the predictors utilised in their model; and it was reported to have the second strongest impact on the outcome variable. The strongest predictor was sense of belonging which referred to consumers' emotional involvement with a social group.

In their investigation of consumers' motives to generate positive WOM messages, Sundaram et al.(1998) asked a sample of consumers to remember a consumption-related conversation they engaged in no more than two months prior to data collection. Then, they asked the respondents about the content of those conversations and the motives behind their decision to contribute to those conversations. Subsequently, consumers' answers were examined by independent judges who identified four motives one of which was altruism. Of three hundred and sixty-three conversations that included positive WOM messages, one hundred and four (28.7%) were motivated by altruism. This represented the second most frequently identified motive behind product involvement.

In the aforementioned studies, the behaviour of helping seems to be viewed as situational in nature as opposed to dispositional. Situational helping pertains primarily to a specific situation in which the helper and/or the receiver of the help find themselves, whereas dispositional helping pertains to a personality type with an inherent proclivity to help others in different situations (Batson & Powell, 2003; Gebauer, Riketta, Broemer, & Maio, 2008). The positive relationship between consumers' desire to help others and generating WOM messages was also reported earlier in Price et al.(1995) where helping was conceptualised as dispositional. Price et al.(1995) had consumers' dispositions to altruistically help others as one of four antecedents to the behaviour of helping other consumers make consumption and purchase decisions. One aspect of this helping behaviour (i.e., the outcome variable) was the provision of information and advice. A positive and significant relationship between the two variables was reported. The sample recruited in the study of Price et

al.(1995)consisted of female and male heads of households in the United States, and the study did not focus on specific products or industries.

The marketing and psychology literature suggests that a person's decision to help others has two pre-requisites (Mazzarol et al., 2007; Price et al., 1995). First, the helper recognises the need of someone else (Batson & Shaw, 1991). In the context of consumers' WOM, this corresponds to the sender of a WOM message recognising the need of another consumer for information or advice (Sundaram et al., 1998). The recognition of the needs of others can be the result of the helper observing others in a needy situation (Mazzarol et al., 2007). For example, a consumer could infer from the facial or indirect verbal expressions of another consumer that the latter is in need for guidance or advice (Hoffman, 1984). The second pre-requisite for helping behaviour is having the competence to help the person in need (Price et al., 1995). Self-efficacy and know-how are alternative labels that have been used in the literature to describe people's competence to help others (Gruen et al., 2006; Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005). In the context of WOM, this refers to the necessary knowledge and expertise about available brands, and also about how to operate or repair a particular product (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Consumers are more likely to help other consumers with WOM messages when they have the necessary expertise and knowledge. However, when consumers do not possess that expertise, they are more likely to refrain from helping because they would feel uncertain about the effectiveness of their help(Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Price et al., 1995).

To explain why consumers decide to help others, two ostensibly competing arguments have been advanced in the literature; egoism and altruism (Batson, 1991; Berger & Milkman, 2012). Egoistic helping refers to a motivational state in which the helper aims to increase their own welfare by helping others (Batson & Shaw, 1991; Cheung & Lee, 2012). Proponents of this view argue that everything people do, including the behaviour of helping others, is necessarily self-serving (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Batson (1991) noted that when a prospective egoistic helper recognises that another individual is in a needy situation, the helper might have one or more of the following responses. First, the situation of the person in need might lead the helper to identify personal rewards that can be reaped by providing help. For instance, by helping others, people might gain praise and social approval for being helpful (Baumann, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 1981); their self-esteem might be boosted (Berger, 2014); and ultimately, these intangible benefits and the mere feeling of pride that could ensue

subsequent to helping might lead the helper to feel good about themselves (Tong et al., 2007). Additionally, people may decide to help others in the hope that those whom they help are going to reciprocate in the future (Cheung & Lee, 2012). Furthermore, people may help others by giving them advice because they want to increase their personal influence; and in turn, their influence over the behaviour of others could serve as validation of the potency of their advice (Cheung et al., 2007). All the benefits mentioned above are considered egoistic motives because they motivate people to act in order to enhance their own welfare.

The second response that could be engendered by the recognition of a needy person stems from the prospective helper identifying negative consequences to themselves if they do not provide help. That is to say, recognising someone is in need for help, and then opting not to provide help could potentially subject people to some sort of social sanction. For example, people may decide to help others because helping demonstrates compliance with social norms; and failing to satisfy those social norms could cause people to be shamed or censured by others. Consequently, people might decide to help in order to escape those negative consequences (Batson & Shaw, 1991). In addition, people's helpful behaviour might be instigated by a set of values or internalised beliefs such as the responsibility they feel toward an individual in their social group or their belief in justice (Cheung & Lee, 2012). Failing to provide help to a person in need could be considered a failure to uphold personal beliefs; and this could lead to feelings of guilt (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Batson and Shaw(1991) argued that helpful actions people proffer to others in order to escape undesirable social or personal consequences are considered egoistic. This is so because the primary purpose of such actions is to enhance the helper's own welfare.

The third response to recognising a person in need results from the distress people might feel after that recognition (Dovidio, 1984). Witnessing a person in need could potentially trigger emotional feelings of distress, anxiety or upset(Batson & Shaw, 1991). In such a situation, people might decide to help because they view helping as an instrument to reduce their distress. Because this type of helping is concerned with the reduction of one's own distress, it is considered egoistic in nature.

Altruistic helping refers to a motivational state in which the helper aims to increase the welfare of others voluntarily and without expecting any gains in return (Batson, 1991;

Sundaram et al., 1998; Yap et al., 2013). In altruistic helping, recognition that another needs help by the prospective helper does not primarily lead to personal distress nor to a calculation of potential rewards or punishments. Rather, the recognition of others' needs might lead the prospective helper to understand the needy situation both cognitively and emotionally in a way that is similar to how the person in need views the situation. This process is known in the literature as perspective taking (Batson, 1991). As a result of taking the perspective of the person in need, the prospective helper might develop a feeling of empathy with and have compassion for that person (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Batson and Shaw(1991) suggested that the occurrence of this empathic feeling could be the result of similar experiences which the prospective helper previously felt. Alternatively, the empathic response could be due to an emotional attachment between the prospective helper and the person in need. Following the occurrence of empathy, fulfilling the need of the person to whom the empathic feeling is directed becomes the primary goal of the prospective helper (Batson, 1991; Price et al., 1995).

Arguing for the existence of altruistic motives when helping has been acknowledged to be a challenging and complicated task (Berger, 2012; Kankanhalli et al., 2005). Even in a purely altruistic helping situation, it is conceivable that the helper will be egoistically proud after altruistically providing help to others (Nagel, 1970). However, this view does not necessarily mean that altruism does not exist as a motive for helping.

In their seminal paper, Batson and Shaw(1991)argued in favour of altruism. With the aim of disentangling egoistic from altruistic motives of helping, the authors put forward a completing argument.The authors first differentiated between ultimate goals and intermediate goals. The former are goals that are ends in themselves, whereas the latter are means by which other goals can be reached. This means that if there is an obstacle that prevents a person from achieving an intermediate goal, the person will search for another way through which the ultimate goal can be achieved. Also, the distinction between these two types of goals implies that the achievement of the ultimate goal should diminish the motivation to pursue the intermediate goal (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Applying this reasoning in the egoism/altruism context, the authors argued that in a situation where increasing the welfare of others is considered the ultimate goal, any egoistic benefits the helper might gain from helping are regarded as unintended consequences.

To support their argument, Batson and Shaw (1991) presented what they called the empathy-altruism hypothesis. This hypothesis involves a manipulation of two groups. The first group includes individuals who are able to achieve egoistic goals without having to help a person in need; the other includes individuals who can achieve the same egoistic goals only by helping. If the result of this manipulation excludes the effect of non-egoistic variables, then this represents evidence against empathic/altruistic helping. Otherwise, the experiment will raise the possibility of altruism as a better or at least an additional explanation for helping (Batson & Shaw, 1991).

The authors cited a number of experiments that have been conducted to test the above-mentioned hypothesis. Fultz, Batson, Fortenbach, McCarthy, and Varney (1986) conducted an experiment where participants were given a chance to help a person in need. Some participants were conditioned to have low empathy toward the needy person and others were conditioned to have high empathy. Also, some participants were informed that if they decide not to help, both the experimenter and the person in need will know. Other participants were told that if they decide not to help, no one will know. The last two manipulations were meant to capture the egoistic motive of wanting to escape an anticipated social punishment if help is not provided. The results showed that empathy caused the behaviour of helping even in the group who were led to believe that no one will know about their decision not to help.

Batson et al. (1991) ran an experiment where participants observed an interview with a person in need without being able to provide help. Some participants were induced to have low empathy toward that person and some were induced to have high empathy. After observing the person in need, all participants were asked to choose between listening to a second interview with the same person or listening to an interview with someone else. Additionally, some respondents were informed that there is a twenty per cent chance the situation of the needy person would improve; others were told that the chance of improvement was fifty per cent; and others were told it was eighty per cent. Results showed that participants in the high empathy group chose to listen to a second interview with the needy person more frequently than those in the low empathy group. This effect was detected across the three different levels of likelihood of improvement. In contrast, the likelihood of a participant from the low empathy group choosing the second interview with the needy person was a function of how likely the person's situation was to improve; low-

empathic participants were interested in hearing from the needy person again only when the likelihood of improvement was high. Based on this finding, Batson et al.(1991)concluded that low empathic participants were motivated by the egoistic feeling of joy that is anticipated as a result of observing improvement in the situation of the needy person.

Further support for the altruistic helping argument can be found in experiments conducted in earlier research. For example, Barnett, King, and Howard(1979) administered an experiment where they divided a sample of children into six groups after rewarding them for participation. Children in the first group were asked to remember a happy event which they had experienced before. Those in the second and third groups were asked to think of neutral and sad events respectively which they had experienced. Children in the fourth group were asked to remember a happy event that others had experienced. By the same token, those in the fifth and sixth groups were required to remember a neutral and a sad events respectively that were experienced by others. Subsequently, all participating children were given a chance to share their rewards with other children who were not as fortunate as they were. Results revealed that children who focused on sad events that happened to others were more likely to share compared to those focused on sad events that they themselves encountered (Barnett et al., 1979)

In light of the above literature review, the current research views the concept of wanting to help as the consumer's willingness to voluntarily fulfil the need of another consumer for advice and information. Such voluntary action can be influenced by altruistic and/or egoistic factors. Nevertheless, these factors are de-emphasised in the above conceptualisation of wanting to help. Rather, the concept of wanting to help focuses mainly on the behaviour of helping not on the psychological forces driving this behaviour. This conceptualisation implies three conditions. First, wanting to help has to be preceded by the prospective helper recognising the need of another consumer for advice and information. Second, wanting to help involves a situation of knowledge discrepancy between at least two consumers. This discrepancy elicits in the more knowledgeable consumer a sense of confidence in their competence to provide help. Third, the prospective helper has to have the willingness to share that knowledge with the other individual who lacks it. This sharing of knowledge could be motivated both altruistically and egoistically.



## 2.4 Self enhancement

Another WOM dissemination predictor that is featured prominently in the literature is self enhancement. This predictor is defined in Eisingerich, Chun, Liu, Jia, and Bell (2015) as “people’s desire to see themselves in a positive frame and present themselves favourably to others (p. 121). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) define self enhancement as people’s motivation to gain positive recognition from others. From a more consumption-specific perspective, Sundaram et al. (1998) view self enhancement as consumers’ “effort to enhance their image among others by projecting themselves as intelligent shoppers” (Categorisation of Motivations, para. 4).

De Angelis, Bonezzi, Peluso, Rucker, and Costabile (2012) argue that self enhancement occurs when people succeed in making a link between their self-concept and favourable personal outcomes. A review of the WOM literature points to four ways through which this link can be made. First, consumers can generate WOM messages about the premium brands and luxury products they consume or have consumed in order to signal their economic status to others (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007; Lovett et al., 2013). By talking to other people about luxurious consumption experiences, consumers gain a sense of prestige and prominence (Bao & Mandrik, 2004; Han, Nunes, & Dreze, 2010). Such social benefits can be explained by the prevalent perception among consumers that a high price can often be construed as a signal of high quality (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

Second, the generation of WOM messages in the form of giving consumption related advice to others can be a means to bolster the sender’s social status (Berger, 2014). By giving this type of advice, the sender of the WOM message seeks to assume the role of an opinion leader who has influence over the opinions and purchase decisions of their followers (Dichter, 1966; Gatignon & Robertson, 1986). Moreover, the sender’s sense of self is further enhanced when the recipient of the WOM message heeds the sender’s advice because this gives support to the sender’s own judgement (Dichter, 1966). Tamir and Mitchell (2012) note that knowing one’s judgements and opinions are shared and supported by other people serves as a stimulus which is processed by the same areas of the brain that respond to other types of stimuli such as food, money and an attractive other.

Third, senders of WOM messages can focus on the uniqueness of a product they have consumed (Berger, 2014; Lovett et al., 2013). Some individuals are prone to have a need to

be different from others (Cheema & Kaikati, 2010; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). This need is labelled counter-conformity motivation in the literature. When uniqueness-driven individuals view themselves as being largely similar to others, their sense of self and identity is threatened (Tian et al., 2001). Consequently, this threat will then lead these individuals to develop the counter-conformity motivation. In accordance with this motivation, individuals are likely to engage in behaviours and choices that are not consistent with the norms of their social environment (Nail, 1986). Nevertheless, the occurrence of these behavioural responses is conditioned upon any potential social penalties being not harsh (Tian et al., 2001).

Fourth, WOM messages facilitate consumers' self enhancement by serving as a proof of the sender's expertise and knowledge (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Yap et al., 2013).

Consumption expertise and knowledge is the possession of an informed understanding of product attributes and quality, retentive memory of brand names and advertisement information, and the ability to compare and contrast prices (Packard & Wooten, 2013). Such expertise enables consumers to pick the best of two or more consumption alternatives. Accordingly, this ability makes it easy for expert consumers to generate WOM messages that influence the consumption decisions of other inexperienced consumers (Wojnicki & Godes, 2008). As a result, this boosts their self-concept and may lead to others recognising them as experts (Cheung & Lee, 2012). Additionally, consumers who think of themselves as having more knowledge than others might integrate this knowledge superiority into their self-concept (Wojnicki & Godes, 2008). Thus, in order to maintain this superiority, knowledgeable consumers are likely to share that knowledge with others through WOM (Packard & Wooten, 2013).

The four ways described above where generating WOM is utilised as a means to self-enhance have been empirically supported in research. De Angelis et al. (2012) conducted a number of experiments to examine the effect of the need to self-enhance on the generation of WOM messages. In one of these experiments, the authors assigned participants to one of two groups. Those in the first group were asked to write about their worst performance during their academic studies; whereas those in the other group were asked to write about their regular daily activities. Thus, the first group comprised individuals who were induced to have a high need to self-enhance; whereas those in the second group represented the control condition.

After this manipulation, all respondents were asked to talk to a research assistant who was posing as another participant about consumption experiences they had in the past. The assistant who was not privy to the purpose of the experiment was instructed to listen to what participants had to say and contribute less to the conversation. Additionally, the conversation with the assistant was recorded without participants' knowledge. The aim of the last three procedural steps was to make the experiment resemble a real-life situation as much as possible. Subsequently, the content of what participants talked about was analysed by independent judges. These judges assessed the valence of what participants said in terms of being positive, neutral, or negative. Results showed that participants in the first group whose need to self-enhance was primed talked positively about their consumption experiences more than those in the control group (De Angelis et al., 2012).

De Angelis et al. (2012) replicated this experiment with a different sample and after making a slight change in the design of the experiment. Instead of manipulating the need to self-enhance, they measured participants' self-esteem; and then based on participants' scores, participants were assigned to two groups: low and high self-esteem. Results of this experiment showed that those who scored low on self-esteem generated more WOM than those who had high self-esteem. De Angelis et al. (2012) cited the results of both experiments to argue for self-enhancement as a motive of consumers' behaviour of generating WOM messages.

Lampel and Bhalla (2007) examined the effect of five predictors on consumers' behaviour of posting online reviews about their consumption experiences. Of the five, only status seeking had a significant and positive effect on the outcome variable. In addition, in some of the studies that were cited in preceding sections of this chapter, a positive link between self-enhancement and consumers' WOM dissemination was also detected. In the Sundaram et al. (1998) study, self-enhancement was the third strongest predictor of consumers' WOM dissemination after involvement and altruism. In the study by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), self-enhancement was the fourth and least significant predictor of WOM dissemination after social benefits (i.e., integration and identification with a social group), economic incentives, and concern for others. In Cheung and Lee (2012), gaining a reputation as an expert was identified as the third strongest predictor of consumers' intentions to generate WOM after the need for belonging and enjoyment of helping.

Lovett et al. (2013) reported a positive association between differentiated brands and the likelihood of consumers generating WOM messages. The authors argue that this link is due to consumers' desire to express uniqueness which is a form of self-enhancement. The authors also reported a positive link between brands that are considered high-quality and the behaviour of generating WOM. This association was interpreted to be consumers' attempt to signal their expertise, knowledge, and self-esteem which is another form of self-enhancement. Furthermore, the authors reported that consumers' tendency to generate WOM messages was positively influenced by premium brands. This relationship serves as an indication of consumers' effort to demonstrate their economic status.

In order to understand people's need to self-enhance, two premises can be cited from the literature. First, when people's perception of their self-concept becomes negative, they are likely to have a low self-esteem (Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). The second premise maintains that in the interest of compensating for their low self-esteem, individuals would engage in a process known as downward comparisons (Wills, 1981). The downward comparison theory explains people's behavioural tendencies when their well-being is being threatened. The threat could be due to a disease or a physical injury, or it could be material in nature such as a financial loss. Such threats could cause the threatened individual to feel inferior in comparison to others who are better off; and consequently, the individual's self-esteem could plunge. The theory posits that when people's well-being is being threatened, they tend to compare themselves to other individuals whose wellbeing is worse off. Subsequently, the comparison is supposed to reduce the sense of threat and restore balance to the individual's disturbed well-being (Wills, 1981).

Support for the first premise can be found in a number of sources such as Smith and Mackie (2000) and De Angelis et al. (2012). In their translation of the widely utilised Rosenberg self-esteem scale from English to Spanish, Martin-Albo, Nunez, Navarro, and Grijalvo (2007) correlated the scale with the five dimensions of the self-concept scale of García and Musitu (1999). These five dimensions include people's perceptions of their academic performance, their social relationships, their roles in their families, their emotional status, and their physical conditions. The authors reported strong and positive correlations between the two scales, attesting to the assertion that self-concept and self-esteem are positively related.

Research has presented empirical support for the second premise as well (see De Angelis et al., 2012; Gibbons, 1986). Gibbons and Gerrard (1989) ran an experiment to examine the impact of social comparisons on participants' moods. After measuring participants' self-esteem, participants were divided into two groups based on their self-esteem scores. All participants were informed about a student who had encountered some problems after arriving at the university. However, a group of participants were told that the student was dealing successfully with the problems; and another group of participants were told that the student was struggling to cope with the problems. The information that the first group received represented an upward comparison condition, while the second group represented the downward comparison condition. Results from this experiment revealed that the information received by the second group had a significant positive effect on participants' mood. Conversely, the mood of participants in the first group was not affected by the information they received (Gibbons & Gerrard, 1989). This suggests that comparing oneself to another who is in a worse-off situation is positively associated with enhanced self-esteem, providing support to the theory of downward comparison.

While self-enhancement is a phenomenon that is primarily manifested when people's self-concept is negative, it is nonetheless a proclivity that is commonly displayed by people across different situations and circumstances (Packard, 2012). This is evident in several human dispositional tendencies and biases such as the above-average bias. The above-average bias is people's tendency to heuristically view their dispositional qualities and abilities as better than those of others (Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, & Vredenburg, 1995). The pervasiveness of human tendencies like these stems from their positive association with indispensable human conditions in terms of physical and psychological wellbeing (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004).

## **2.5 Interpersonal relationships**

Another predictor of WOM dissemination that has received attention in the literature is the interpersonal relationship between the sender and the receiver of the WOM message. This connection has been defined in Cho et al. (2012) as the intimacy between two or more individuals. Similarly, it has been defined in Gremler, Gwinner, and Brown (2001) as "a strong sense of affiliation or bond based on some tie" (p. 5). These two definitions exclude other types of relationships that lack intimacy and bonding. For example, absent any sense of

bonding, the relationship that exists between a shop clerk and a customer or between a doctor and a patient would not be construed as an interpersonal relationship. Rather, such a relationship would be described as a formal relationship in which there are specific and impersonal roles that are expected to be fulfilled by the relationship members (Assael et al., 2007).

Relatedly, Adler and Kwon(2002) differentiated between three types of social relationships; market relationship, hierarchical relationship, and social relationship. Market relationships involve the exchange of products based on specific terms of exchange that are clearly stated or understood. Hierarchical relationships require one party to obey the orders of the other party in the relationship in exchange for material security. Social relationships involve the parties of the relationship having tentative expectations that they will do favours for each other. While Adler and Kwon's(2002) market and hierarchical relationships seem to be in accord with the definition of formal relationships, their social relationship is more in line with the aforementioned definition of interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal relationships develop out of humans' need for belonging. This human need has been identified and discussed extensively by many authors such as Maslow(1943), Bowlby(1976), and Baumeister and Leary(1995). Baumeister and Leary(1995) argued that humans have an inherent and universal need to cultivate and sustain relationships with others. Evolution-based arguments are among those the authors cited to support their view. Developing relationships and forming groups is a fundamental means for survival. Through groups and interpersonal relationships, resources and information are shared, risk is reduced, and external threats are staved off (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For example, Elder and Clipp(1988) showed that interpersonal relationships involving soldiers who fought WW2 together in a single unit were forty years later stronger compared with WW2 veterans who were not members of the same combat unit.

Additionally, the need for belonging is innate in humans because of the significant consequences that would ensue from the fulfilment or frustration of this need. This view concurs with the general principle of psychological hedonism which posits that the ultimate goal of people's actions is to attain pleasure and avoid pain(Higgins, 1997). Baumeister and Leary(1995) note that developing a bond with another individual results in favourable feelings of joy and happiness. Furthermore, close interpersonal relationships are often

associated with a mutual sense of commitment between the parties of the relationship to each other's belongingness need (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). On the other hand, failing to satisfy the need for belongingness could lead to adverse consequences. Research has shown that individuals who lack bonding in their lives are more likely to suffer from stress and loneliness (Berger, 2014; MacDonald & Leary, 2005), more likely to suffer from mental illness (Hamachek, 1992), less likely to battle cancer successfully (Aizer et al., 2013; Goodwin, Hunt, Key, & Samet, 1987), more likely to develop abnormal eating habits, and more at risk of committing suicide (Rothberg & Jones, 1987).

In order for a social relationship to be regarded as a strong interpersonal one, Baumeister and Leary (1995) put forth two precepts. First, parties of the relationship have to have frequent interaction. Second, they have to have a persistent empathic concern for and positive feelings towards each other. Individuals would be satisfied with the interpersonal relationship they are part of when both criteria are fulfilled. They would be less satisfied when only one criterion is fulfilled. When neither criterion is fulfilled, members of the relationship would be least satisfied.

A number of empirical findings have been cited that attest to Baumeister and Leary's (1995) argument. Gerstel and Gross (1982) investigated the satisfaction of individuals with the long-distance interpersonal relationships in which they were members. These relationships involved people who were romantically related, but lived apart. The authors reported that couples in this situation valued the feelings they had for each other, but felt stressed over the lack of frequent interaction. The authors also reported that as interactions between couples increased and became more frequent, their level of stress diminished.

By the same token, research shows that interpersonal relationships that involve regular interaction but lack persistent bonding are not optimal either. It is feasible that individuals who have multiple social connections could still feel lonely if these connections are devoid of mutual bonding and genuine and positive feelings. McLeod (1982) argued that this is the case in the sex industry. Even though sex workers engage in ostensibly intimate encounters with clients, these encounters cannot be regarded as interpersonal relationships. This is so because such encounters are part of what the job of a sex worker formally involves, and they lack mutual and genuine bonding which is a characteristic of authentic interpersonal relationships. This explanation is evident in McLeod's (1982) finding that sex workers do not

regard the brief encounters they have with clients as an enduring and stable interpersonal relationships. Instead, they seek to find relationships outside the sex industry. Along the same line, Baumeister(1991) compared the happiness of single parents with the happiness of spouses who do not have children. Their results revealed that the latter group on average was happier than the first group. An explanation of this result could be that spouses are capable of expressing their positive feelings and care toward each other; whereas in a relationship between a single parent and a baby or a child, the child may not be capable of expressing and providing the kind of care that the parent requires.

The two precepts argued for by Baumeister and Leary (1995) seem to be consistent with how an interpersonal relationship is defined conceptually and operationally in the majority of studies that focus on interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, exceptions to this consensus exist in the literature in which only one of the precepts is used to define an interpersonal relationship. Sun et al.(2006) view a strong interpersonal relationship as involving an active connection between individuals, which seems to be compatible with the first of Baumeister and Leary's (1995) criteria of frequent interaction. Chu and Kim (2011) on the other hand define an interpersonal relationship as "the potency of the bond" between individuals (p. 52), which seems to match the second criterion of persistent caring and positive feelings. Aside from exceptions like these, the majority of interpersonal-relationship studies often cite the definition proposed by Granovetter (1973). Granovetter (1973) defined the strength of an interpersonal relationship as "a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services" between individuals (p. 1361).

Empirical evidence indicates that consumers' propensity to generate WOM messages can be largely influenced by strong interpersonal relationships. In other words, the stronger the relationship between two consumers, the higher the likelihood of WOM messages being generated. In the Hennig-Thurau et al.(2004) study cited in previous sections, empirical analysis revealed four variables that significantly predict consumers' propensity to generate WOM messages online. Of these four predictors, the one with the strongest predictive power was a variable labeled social benefits. This variable referred to consumers desire to chat with members of the online community toward which they felt a sense of belonging. Similarly, in the Cheung and Lee (2012) study cited previously, empirical analysis revealed three variables (i.e., sense of belonging, enjoyment of helping, and reputation) that significantly predicted consumers' intentions to generate WOM messages in an online



consumer-opinion platform. Of these three predictors, sense of belonging was the strongest. This variable was operationally defined in the study in terms of the emotional attachment and the friendship between members of the online platform and the social identity and goals they shared.

In a qualitative study, Mazzarol et al. (2007) conducted focus groups to explore the variables that influence consumers' behaviour of generating WOM messages. The closeness of the relationship between two consumers was identified as one variable that increases the likelihood of WOM being generated. Sohn(2009) ran an experiment with a sample of undergraduate students to examine the effect of connection strength and information valence on the tendency of participants to generate WOM messages they have received. Connection strength referred to the strength of the relationship between members of a social network; whereas information valence referred to the WOM message in terms of being positive or negative. The first factor was manipulated by dividing participants into two groups. The first group was asked to identify a number of closest friends, whereas the other group was asked to identify casual acquaintances. The second factor was manipulated by giving two groups of the sample two different sets of information about a hypothetical new product. One group was told that the new product is superior to other brands, and that eighty per cent of its users expressed satisfaction with it. To the other group of the sample, their product was described as inferior to the competition, and that twenty per cent of consumers who purchased the product expressed dissatisfaction with it. Analysis showed that individuals with interpersonal strong connections had more intentions to generate positive WOM messages compared to those with weak connections.

The strong association between strong interpersonal relationships and the tendency of consumers to generate WOM has been detected even in situations in which the act of sharing information is considered disadvantageous to the sender. This was the focus of Frenzen and Nakamoto (1993). The authors of this study argued that generating a WOM message would be disadvantageous to the sender when the value of the disseminated information is high and when the opportunity cost of sending that information is high. The authors conducted an experiment in which participants were asked to imagine a scenario in which they gained knowledge about an unadvertised clothing sale, and that only few people knew about this sale.

The experiment had three factors: information value, opportunity cost, and relationship strength. Information value was manipulated with two conditions. In the first condition, there was a fifteen percent discount offered, whereas in the second condition, the discount was fifty percent. The fifteen percent discount represented a low information value, whereas the fifty percent discount represented a high information value. Opportunity cost was manipulated with two conditions as well. In the first condition, eligibility for the discount was extended to all customers who happened to be in the store during a particular time frame. In the second condition, the discount was offered only to the initial ten customers of the store. The first condition represented a low opportunity cost for the sender because the likelihood of the sender not benefitting from the sale was low. The second condition represented a high opportunity cost for the sender because the chances of them receiving the discount might diminish if the receiver of the WOM message forwarded the message to others. Finally, the strength of the relationship was manipulated with two conditions. Under the first condition, participants were required to name one of their closest friends; whereas under the second condition, participants were required to name an acquaintance. The relationship with the close friend was considered a strong interpersonal relationship, and the relationship with the acquaintance was considered a weak relationship. Subsequently, participants responded to a scale that measured their likelihood of telling the person they identified about the sale. In the results, relationship strength had a large main effect on the dependent variable (i.e., generating WOM messages). Additionally, the effect of strong interpersonal relationships on the generation of WOM did not show much variation across the other two factors.

In addition to the need for belonging being a fundamental human need, interpersonal relationships are also construed as part of an individual's sense of self (Andersen & Chen, 2002). The view that interpersonal relationships are part of the self can be invoked to explain the theoretical basis of the link between interpersonal relationships and the consumer behaviour of generating WOM. Different conceptualisations have been presented in the literature with regard to the concept of self. Of these, the concept receiving the greatest attention is the personal self, which has also been referred to as the independent self and the actual self (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). The personal self refers to the individuated aspects of the self concept that differentiate a single individual from others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Such aspects include personality traits, unique

capabilities and interests which individuals think they characterise their sense of self (Assael et al., 2007; Cross et al., 2000). Relative to these aspects is the inventory of activities, interests and opinions (AIO), which is a common marketing method of measuring consumers' actual lifestyle. If these aspects characterise the personal self that individuals aspire to be, then they would be components of what is known as the ideal self (Assael et al., 2007). Notwithstanding this small variation within the personal self, both actual and ideal selves focus on the self as an individual. Within this individuated view of the self, people are motivated to serve their own interests, and to strive for self-esteem through social comparison with other individuals (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

The second level of the concept of self is the relational self. This level is derived from the strong interpersonal and emotion-laden connections that an individual has with other individuals (Andersen & Chen, 2002). More specifically, it is derived from the emotional roles that individuals are expected to fulfil within interpersonal relationships (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Within this level of the self, individuals are motivated to look after the welfare of the other member of the relationship. Additionally, an individual's self-esteem is derived from their success in sustaining the relationship and in keeping the other member of the relationship satisfied (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Their self-esteem depends on the positive evaluation of how they are fulfilling their relationship roles (Hoelter, 1986).

The third level of the self-concept is known as the collective self. This reflects an individual's assimilation into a social group (Brewer & Gardner, 1996), referring to the identity of an individual as belonging to a social group. The collective self is reflected in the uniformity between an individual and the other members of her or his social group. Such uniformity is manifested in the homogenous way group members think and behave. Stated differently, it is manifested through the individual's conformity to the norms of the group; a process known as self-categorisation (Stets & Burke, 2000). Based on this process, two categories of people are formed. The first encompasses those who are considered part of the group. This is labelled the in-group. The other category, labelled the out-group, includes individuals who do not share the identity of the group. After individuals develop a sense of their collective self, they seek to boost their self-esteem by comparing the in-group to the out-group in a biased way as to favour the former (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Of the three levels of self outlined above, the relational self seems to be the most pertinent in terms of explaining the influence of interpersonal relationships on consumers' WOM dissemination. This could be attributed to the apparent ontological compatibility between the concept of an interpersonal relationship and the relational self, and to the lack thereof with the other two forms of the self concept. The personal self for example could be validly argued to be a predictor of consumers' WOM dissemination in and of itself; however, it is likely untenable to be invoked as a logical explanation for the link between interpersonal relationships and consumers' WOM. Furthermore, the ontological incompatibility between the collective self and the concept of an interpersonal relationship is manifested in the view that a collective identity can be constructed without frequent interactions (Turner, 1982) and without emotional attachment (Hogg & Hardie, 1992) between group members, which are two defining and distinctive features of interpersonal relationships.

As presented earlier, the need for belonging is a fundamental human need. This need, along with the need to uphold one's relational self, prompts people to place paramount importance on maintaining and enhancing the interpersonal relationships they already have (Cheung et al., 2007; Chu & Kim, 2011). To this end, people tend to voluntarily invest large amounts of their resources in those relationships in order to maintain them (Granovetter, 1973). To explain further, a strong interpersonal relationship where a relational identity has been formed instinctively draws investments by the relationship members. Examples of such investments include money, emotions, time, and self-disclosure (Rusbult, 1980). The expenditure of such investments increases commitment in the relationship. In other words, it reduces the likelihood of the relationship being suspended and boosts the bond between the relationship partners (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). Expressed differently, the longer individuals stay in a relationship and the more money and emotions they invest in the relationship, the more committed they become and the stronger their relational identity (Stets & Burke, 2000).

Additionally, the more resources invested in the relationship, the costlier it becomes to leave the relationship. This is attributable to the fact that much of the investments noted above are either intangible and very emotional or not easy to split if the relationship is brought to an end (Rusbult, 1980). Compared to the total number of different types of relationships an individual can have in their life, strong interpersonal relationships are often limited in terms of quantity (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). When an individual develops a sense of

commitment toward a significant other, the individual's need for belongingness is gradually satiated. As a result, the individual focuses more on the quality of the committed relationship they already have, and less on the quantity of the new relationships they can establish (Andersen & Chen, 2002). Generating WOM messages to aid the consumption decisions of a close other can be regarded as an investment made by the WOM sender to maintain the relationship and to express their commitment to it.

Furthermore, commitment creates a situation in which the relationship is governed by communal norms (Clark, Dubash, & Mills, 1998). Under communal norms, members of the relationship are motivated to do favours to each other out of concern for the needs and well-being of each other (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). For the one who does the favour, this results in loose expectations that the receiver will reciprocate the favour in the future. For the one who receives the favour, it creates a tentative obligation to reciprocate (Clark et al., 1998). The time of the reciprocation is not specified, and the reciprocation does not necessarily need to be comparable in value to the original favour (Clark & Mills, 1979).

This stands in contrast to exchange norms which govern other types of relationships that are more formal such as that between a seller and a customer. Under exchange norms, one party provides the other party with something of value expecting to receive something in return. Nevertheless, commercial reciprocation occurs promptly or at a specified later time (Agarwal, 2014; Aggarwal, 2004). Also, the value of both the original and the reciprocated benefits are specified and comparable (Clark et al., 1998). Put another way, the balance of the receiving and giving of benefits are scrutinised more stringently in an exchange relationship compared to a communal relationship (Agarwal, 2014). The leniency that characterises communal norms is attributable to the emotional attachment and trust that exist in interpersonal relationships; which are elements that do not necessarily exist in relationships that are governed by exchange norms (Bartz & Lydon, 2008). Generating WOM messages between members in an interpersonal relationship can be understood within the context of communal norms.

The arguments cited above to explain the link between interpersonal relationships and consumers' WOM can be considered of a micro level, in the sense that they are concerned with psychological motives. Approaching this link from a different and larger-scale angle, Granovetter (1973) argues that interpersonal relationships, both strong and weak, are

positively related to WOM. Expressed more plainly, the stronger the relationship between individuals within a social network, the more likely one of those individuals will generate WOM messages to their close other; but also, the weaker the relationship between individuals within a social network, the more likely one will generate WOM messages to their acquaintances. The explanations that Granovetter (1973) provides for his propositions seem to be related more to the structure of the social networks that encapsulate those relationships as opposed to explanations that are related more to the individuals involved.

For strong interpersonal relationships, Granovetter (1973) argues that the large number of WOM messages that are disseminated via these social ties is attributable to the high frequency of interactions that occurs in these relationships. For weak interpersonal relationships, Granovetter (1973) and others such as Brown and Reingen (1987), invoke the principle of homophily to explain the tendency of individuals to generate WOM. Homophily refers to the extent of similarity between two individuals in terms of socio-economic characteristics such as age, gender, education, and social status. Within a social network, members of a strong interpersonal relationship tend to be homophilous on those characteristics; while those in a weak interpersonal relationship are more likely to be heterophilous (Granovetter, 1973). Moreover, the socio-economic similarity results in similarity between individuals in terms of the things they are interested in. Conversely, those who are different on a socio-economic basis are likely to lack that similarity (Cho et al., 2012; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). It is argued that this dissimilarity of interests gives the WOM sender an opportunity to tell others about something that they might not know about from their close friends (Granovetter, 1973). In line with this distinction between strong and weak interpersonal relationships, the former are argued to be an optimal target for the diffusion of information within close social networks, whereas weak interpersonal relationships are rather described as bridges between networks in terms of information diffusion (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Meuter et al., 2013).

## **2.6 Product innovativeness**

Another concept that has been utilised in previous research in the prediction of consumers' WOM dissemination is product innovativeness. Other labels have been used to refer to this concept such as product originality (Moldovan, Goldenberg, & Chattopadhyay, 2011), novelty (Forster, Marguc, & Gillebaart, 2010), and breakthrough (Danneels & Kleinschmidt, 2002).

2001). This variable was defined in Garcia and Calantone (2002) simply as newness of the product. In Moldovan et al. (2011), the concept is defined as “product newness or uniqueness as perceived by the consumer relative to previous offerings” (p. 110). From a broader point of view, Rogers (1983) defines product innovativeness as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual” (p. 11). In harmony with these definitions, Forster et al. (2010) describe this concept simply as “lack of familiarity” (p. 738).

Under the definitions mentioned above, different aspects of the product can be construed as being innovative. If the core concept of a product is new, this would constitute a good or a service innovation. If the newness is manifested in the aesthetics of the product, this would be perceived as a design innovation. Similarly, if the good or service is delivered in a unique and new way, this would constitute a process innovation. By the same token, if the consumer is informed about the product in a new and unique fashion, this would be regarded as an innovative marketing message (Vogt, 2013).

In general, two categories of innovation can be identified in the literature, and different labels were used to refer to each category. The first category has been referred to as new models (Feng & Papatla, 2012), really new (Vogt, 2013), and radical or major innovations (Danneels & Kleinschmidt, 2001). The second category has been labelled redesigns (Feng & Papatla, 2012), incrementally new (Vogt, 2013), evolutionary, continuous (Veryzer, 1998) and minor innovations (Danneels & Kleinschmidt, 2001). The first category is described in Feng and Papatla (2012), a study of the automobile industry, as new models of automobiles introduced to the market for the first time either as a new product category or as an addition to an existing category. In contrast, Feng and Papatla (2012) define the second category as modifications that are added to existing models. Comparably, Vogt (2013) describes the first category of innovations as products that are radically new in terms of their technology or the benefits they provide to the consumer. Conversely the second category includes innovations that are mere refinements to existing products (Vogt, 2013). In other words, both the technology behind these innovative products and the consumer benefits they provide do not amount to a significant departure from what is offered in existing products.

According to Rogers (1983), much of the research that has investigated the relationship between product innovativeness on one hand and consumers' WOM dissemination and

product adoption on the other hand has been subsumed in the diffusion of innovations literature. As discussed in Chapter One, this stream of research emphasises the dispositional trait of innovativeness that particular consumers possess (e.g., opinion leaders) in driving WOM propagation. A counter perspective to this view is the investigation of the inherent role of innovative products in driving consumers' WOM dissemination irrespective of the personality traits of the WOM senders. Perceiving innovativeness as a dispositional construct places an untenable constraint on the meaning of innovation.

This restriction seems to have been brought about as a result of the assumption that particular consumers, who are described as innovators, have the ability, more so than others, to influence the opinions and the consumption decisions of other consumers (Iyengar et al., 2010). This assumption was challenged in Section 1.3.1.3. Additionally, describing innovativeness as a personal disposition seems to create a conceptual overlap with the definition of enduring involvement. Consumers who have a high degree of innovativeness are said to have knowledge and expertise in a particular product category (Van den Bulte & Lilien, 2001) and influence over other consumers (Pescher & Spann, 2014). The same characteristics were also mentioned to describe consumers who have a high degree of enduring involvement (Houston & Rothschild, 1978). Dissociating innovativeness from the dispositional sphere and tying it to the product or the producer of the product clears up that conceptual overlap. In addition, it presents a clearer and simpler conceptualisation of innovativeness.

Moldovan et al. (2011) and Feng and Papatla (2012) presented empirical evidence of a positive relationship between product innovativeness and consumers' tendency or intention to generate positive WOM messages. More specifically, Moldovan et al. (2011), through a series of studies, reported a positive association between what they call product originality and the amount of intentional and actual WOM messages. In one correlational study, the authors collected pictures and descriptive information that were available on public domains, about twenty new products from different categories. Subsequently, once every week over a period of twenty weeks, a sample of respondents were emailed a picture of a new product, a brief description of the product, and a link to an online questionnaire. Among the variables measured by the questionnaire were the originality (i.e., newness) of the product and also the consumers' intentions to generate positive or negative WOM about the product. The results revealed a positive effect of the innovativeness of the product on



the amount of WOM messages consumers intended to generate. Furthermore, the positive valence of the intentional WOM messages were influenced mainly by consumers' perception that the product would provide useful and new benefits either to them or to other people.

In another study, Moldovan et al. (2011) conducted a two by two experiment where the two factors were product originality and product usefulness. Participants were requested to visit a webpage that contained information about a new product (i.e., laptop), and answer a number of questions related to their WOM intentions. Four versions of the web page were created. One version described the battery of the laptop as a regular battery that would last for only half an hour when the power is off. Another version described the battery as a regular battery that would last for six hours. The third and fourth versions of the web page claimed that the battery derived energy every time a button on the keyboard is pressed. Similar to the first two versions, the third version of the web page claimed that the battery would last for half an hour; whereas in the fourth version, the battery would last for six hours. The type of battery manipulation represented the product originality factor, and the battery's life represented the product usefulness factor. Results of the experiment replicated those results obtained from the earlier correlational study. A significant and positive main effect of product originality on intentions to generate WOM messages was found. Additionally, a significant and positive interaction was found between product originality and product usefulness. In the case of high product usefulness, high product originality is associated with increased amount of intentional positive WOM messages (Moldovan et al., 2011).

In a third study, Moldovan et al. (2011) also sought to confirm the above results with actual WOM. To that end, they identified a group of new products that were stocked on the Amazon.com website. Ten judges who were not familiar with these products rated the originality and usefulness of the products. Three months after identifying those products, the website was revisited and the consumers' reviews of the products were collected. These reviews were then counted and content-analysed by independent judges to arrive at two measures of WOM amount and WOM valence respectively. Regression results of this study were a repetition of the main results obtained from the two previous studies with intentional WOM. Explicitly, product originality increased the amount of disseminated WOM (i.e., number of reviews). In addition, product usefulness positively and significantly influenced the positive valence of the reviews.

The aforementioned studies of Moldovan et al. (2011) present empirical evidence for a positive association between one category of innovations (i.e., really new products) and consumers' WOM dissemination. Feng and Papatla (2012) present empirical evidence from the automobile industry for a positive association between the other category of innovations (i.e., incrementally new products) and generating WOM. Collecting data from two consumer review websites, the authors focused on six hundred and sixteen models of automobiles across a six-year period. Both websites enabled consumers to rate the automobiles that were discussed on the website in terms of favourability and unfavourability. The authors utilised these ratings as a proxy measure of consumers' WOM dissemination which was the outcome variable. In the study, the authors used a number of variables to predict the outcome variable. Of interest among these predictors were two variables that denoted product innovativeness. One was labelled new models. This variable referred to automobiles that were being introduced to the market for the first time. The other variable was labelled redesigns; it referred to the changes that were being added to existing models.

Interestingly, results from both websites showed that redesigns significantly and positively increased the volume of consumers' WOM; whereas the effect of new products on consumers' WOM was not significant. The authors attributed this difference between the two innovation categories to customer awareness. They maintained that redesigned automobiles are more likely to be seen as familiar by consumers than totally new models of automobiles; and hence the discrepancy between the two categories in terms of WOM dissemination. Nevertheless, other possible explanations might be discerned by delving deeper into the logical and theoretical underpinnings that underlie innovativeness as a concept and also those that underlie the link between innovativeness and consumers' WOM dissemination. The remainder of this section tackles these logical and theoretical arguments.

The literature seems to point to three prerequisites that must be satisfied before the effect of product innovativeness on the generation of WOM messages takes place. First, the innovation itself needs to be regarded as meaningful and useful from the perspective of the consumer (Vogt, 2013). Product providers and marketers might unilaterally regard their new products as innovative due to a new technology or a new technique that was used in producing the product (McNally, Cavusgil, & Calantone, 2010). This one-sided view of innovativeness however is unlikely to result in the propagation of WOM messages if consumers do not share the same attitude toward the product. Stated differently, in order

for WOM messages to be propagated, an innovation has to be perceived by consumers as being meaningful and useful to them or to other people they know. An innovation is said to be meaningful and useful when consumers perceive that it demonstrably has advantages over alternative products in terms of the benefits it provides (McNally et al., 2010). Such advantages could be most pronounced in terms of cost, functionality, or aesthetics (Vogt, 2013).

The second theoretical prerequisite for innovation-triggered WOM dissemination is the capability of the innovative product to provoke curiosity in the consumer (Vogt, 2013). When a consumer encounters information about a new product, the consumer's mind searches through past experiences for a perceptual category that matches the new piece of information (Forster et al., 2010). An example of this perceptual category could be the broader product category to which the new product belongs. All the pieces of information and past experiences that belong to this category and which are stored in the consumer's memory are retrieved and compared with the newly received information in an attempt to find similarities. This cognitive process could result in two extreme outcomes. The first is high congruity or similarity between the newly received information and the consumer's knowledge and past experiences; and the second outcome is high incongruity (Mandler, 1982).

In line with the theory of cognitive dissonance proposed by Festinger (1957), high incongruity between new information and the consumer's knowledge and past experiences creates a knowledge gap that the consumer might feel uncomfortable about (Forster et al., 2010). As a consequence, this incongruity could increase the consumer's curiosity about the product, and also motivate the consumer to acquire more information about it (Vogt, 2013). Accordingly, the more curious the consumer becomes about the innovative product, the more likely it is that the consumer will initiate conversations with others in the hope of gleaning more information about the innovation. Alternatively, high congruity between information about the new product and the consumer's knowledge and past experiences is likely to be perceived by the consumer as boring and bland (Kang et al., 2009). As a result, the consumer's level of motivation to start a conversation about the new product is likely to drop.

The third prerequisite is an attenuation of the second prerequisite. While the second prerequisite demands the innovation to be potent in provoking curiosity, the third prerequisite emphasises the need for the innovation to be comprehensible (Silvia, 2008). Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) refer to the middle point between these two opposite conditions as moderate incongruity. In the words of Silvia (2006), a stimulus (e.g., a new product) that is moderately incongruent with one's knowledge and past experiences can be described as something that is "not understood but understandable" (p. 58).

While incongruity is necessary for inducing curiosity, there needs to simultaneously be a minimum level of congruity in order to facilitate learning about the new product (Lee & O'Connor, 2003). Without incongruity, consumers would likely lack curiosity about the new product; and without a minimum level of congruity, the consumer would likely lack a frame of reference that could help in gaining an understanding of the new product (McNally et al., 2010). Thus, the higher the incongruity between incoming information and existing knowledge, the more incomprehensible the new product becomes. Furthermore, as this incomprehensibility persists, the consumer's motivation to learn will eventually diminish and be replaced with feelings of confusion (Berger & Iyengar, 2013; Silvia, 2010). Accordingly, moderate incongruity contributes to the consumer's motivation to seek more knowledge about an innovative product; and ultimately, this motivates the consumer to generate positive WOM messages about the product to express their interest in it. Such messages are generated in the hope that they would stimulate others to share what they know about the new product.

Following the fulfilment of the aforementioned prerequisites, two motivational states are likely to result vis-à-vis the innovative product. These two motivational states are often invoked in the literature to explain the association between product innovativeness and consumers' behaviour of generating WOM messages. The first motivational state stems from the consumer's view of the new product as something interesting. As alluded to before, things are thought of as interesting when they have an element of novelty and surprise (Berger & Iyengar, 2013; Berger & Schwartz, 2011). Previous research points to a positive relationship between interesting things and people's likelihood of initiating conversations about those things. Berger and Milkman (2012) collected a sample of seven thousand articles that were published by the New York Times newspaper within three months in the year 2008. The authors sought to examine the relationship between articles' content and the

likelihood of the article being shared among readers. Characteristics of the articles' content were determined by content-analysts. Among the characteristics that the articles evoked were awe, interest, and practicality, with the latter referring to new and useful information that is capable of affecting a change in the reader's behaviour. Other characteristics included anger, anxiety, and sadness. The results showed that articles that were described as awesome, interesting, and practically useful came high on the list of the most shared articles.

Furthermore, Bakshy et al. (2011) recorded a total of seventy four million public tweets that were tweeted and then re-tweeted by 1.6 million users in a two-month period in 2009. All the tweets recorded in the study included a URL link. Of that number of tweets, a sample of one thousand tweets were selected and presented to human judges who rated how interesting they thought the URL was. The results indicated that on average URL links that were rated more interesting got re-tweeted more than those that were rated less interesting.

Along with viewing a new product as interesting, the consumer develops a second motivational state that stems from the consumer's need to make sense of the new product and of what triggered their interest in it. Sense-making is a cognitive process that aims to explain and reduce the incongruity between a new stimulus and existing knowledge (Weick, 1995). Generating WOM messages has been suggested in the literature as one among a number of ways by which incongruity can be explained and reduced (Moore, 2009; Rime, 2009). Specifically, the sender of positive WOM in this context shares with others what he or she knows about the new product rather than explicitly asks others to share what they know (Rime, 2007). This can facilitate the process of sense-making in two ways. First, interest has been regarded as an emotion (Silvia, 2006) that a person could be engulfed by without fully comprehending why this feeling came about (Berger, 2014; Moore, 2009). By talking favourably to others about a new and interesting product, the sender of the positive WOM message transforms the emotion of interest into a narrative that is more cognitive and comprehensible to both the sender and the receiver of the message (Rime, 2009).

Second, following the discernment by the consumer of an incongruity between incoming information and existing knowledge, and following the consumer's attempt to think of an interpretation of the incongruity, the consumer becomes motivated to look for other people

who have the same interpretation (Festinger, 1957). One channel through which this quest for consensus and for social support can occur is by generating WOM messages. In doing so, the consumer shares with others what he or she knows and thinks about the new product; and consequently, this might motivate the receiver of the message to chime in and share their opinion about the product. The incongruity between the new product and the consumer's existing knowledge decreases every time the WOM sender's interpretation of the new product garners consensus among others (Festinger, 1957). Concurrently, depending on the extent by which the incongruity diminishes and a consensus is built, the sender also gauges their need to generate further WOM messages about the product (Moore, 2009). Subsequently, as the consensus around the sender's interpretation grows, the sender's motivation to talk about the new product decreases because of the sender's perception that the source of the incongruity has been resolved. Later on, the product becomes common knowledge and its perceived interestingness recedes (Sernovitz, 2012).

## **2.7 Consumer loyalty**

Another WOM dissemination predictor that has been cited in the literature is consumer loyalty. Different approaches have been adopted in the literature to define loyalty as a concept. Furthermore, the most inclusive among those approaches seems to share basic characteristics with the concept of commitment. One of those approaches considers consumers' behaviour of generating WOM messages about a particular brand as a component of the concept of consumer's loyalty (Mazzarol et al., 2007; Selnes, 1993; Tsai, 2011). Following this approach, Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol (2002) describe consumer loyalty toward a particular brand as the consumer's intention to generate positive WOM messages about the brand and to also repurchase the brand again. Under this conceptualisation of loyalty, the concept cannot be used as a predictor of consumers' WOM dissemination because the behaviour of generating WOM is part of its conceptual and operational definition already.

Another approach to defining the concept of loyalty extracts WOM dissemination from the concept and focuses solely on repeat purchases or re-patronage of the brand (Assael et al., 2007; Zain, 1993). Re-patronage is the consumer's behaviour of purchasing a good or a service from the same brand consistently over time (Gremler & Brown, 1996). This re-patronage tendency could be due to the high economic cost of switching to another brand,

technical difficulties associated with the consumption of alternative brands, or simply the psychological inconvenience associated with change (Selnes, 1993). Both of the approaches mentioned above represent what is referred to by the majority of loyalty researchers as the behavioural dimension of consumers' loyalty (Hofmeyr & Rice, 2000; Marshall, 2010).

A third and more inclusive approach to defining the concept of consumer loyalty adds an attitudinal dimension to the concept (Assael et al., 2007; Gremler & Brown, 1996). It is this third approach that seemingly reveals the overlap between the concept of consumer loyalty and the concept of brand commitment. This attitudinal dimension is described in Reynolds and Arnold (2000) as the emotional and psychological attachment that a consumer might feel toward a particular brand. In Marshall (2010) and Gremler and Brown (1996), it is described as a positive attitudinal or psychological disposition that a customer might have toward a particular brand. These definitions of loyalty go beyond mere repurchasing behaviour.

This attitudinal conceptualisation of consumer loyalty is almost identical to some of the measurements of brand commitment that have been proposed in previous research. For example, Gruen, Summers, and Acito (2000) identify what they call positive emotional attachment as one dimension of the commitment measurement. Indeed, a number of researchers have pointed to the fact that the concepts of loyalty and commitment within the field of consumer behaviour have been used interchangeably in previous research (see Hofmeyr & Rice, 2000; Oliver, 1999). The inclusion of an attitudinal dimension in the loyalty concept allows the epithet "loyal" to be conferred to consumers who are psychologically or emotionally attached to a brand but cannot afford to buy the brand's product.

When consumers become loyal and committed to a particular brand, they develop a perception of having a personal relationship with the brand (Assael et al., 2007). This perceived relationship is based on similarities that the consumer believes exist between her or himself and the brand (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010).

Generating positive WOM messages is thought of as a means first to sustain this valued relationship overtime (De Matos & Rossi, 2008), and second to convey to others one's self-identity (Brown et al., 2005). Stated differently, generating positive WOM messages about a particular brand reinforces the consumer's commitment to and favourable attitude toward the brand; and it also communicates and informs others about the consumer's character.

The relationship between consumer loyalty and the tendency to generate positive WOM messages has been tested empirically in previous research. Reynolds and Arnold (2000) reported a positive association between consumers' loyalty to apparel stores and how frequently they generate positive WOM messages about the stores. The authors used an overall unidimensional measurement of loyalty that did not specifically distinguish between the behavioural and attitudinal dimensions of the concept. In a similar vein, Brown et al. (2005) detected strong positive correlations between the commitment of car owners to the car dealership on one hand and both their intentional and actual positive WOM. The measurement of commitment in Brown et al.'s (2005) study did not differentiate between the behavioural and the attitudinal dimensions.

Other researchers however lay emphasis on the attitudinal dimension of loyalty when examining the loyalty-WOM relationship. Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) investigated the consequences of three levels of loyalty: covetus loyalty, inertia loyalty, and premium loyalty. The first level describes a consumer who has an emotional attachment to a brand, but lacks the ability to purchase the brand's product. The second refers to a consumer who regularly purchases a particular product out of convenience or habit, but is not emotionally attached to the brand of the product. The third level refers to a consumer who manifests high levels of both emotional attachment toward and regular re-patronage of a particular brand. Utilising a convenience sample of eight hundred and fifty whisky consumers in Athens, Greece, the authors reported a positive relationship between premium loyalty and generating WOM messages, a positive relationship between covetus loyalty and generating WOM messages, and negative relationship between inertia loyalty and generating WOM messages.

Similarly, Carpenter and Fairhurst (2005) used a convenience student sample from the United States to study the relationship between loyalty to specialty apparel stores and consumers' WOM dissemination. Attitudinal loyalty was found to have a strong positive effect on consumers' tendency to generate positive WOM messages about the stores. Likewise, Harrison-Walker (2001) tested the effect of two separate types of consumer commitment (i.e., high sacrifice and affective) on consumers' behaviour of disseminating WOM messages. Those two types of commitment were defined as the equivalent of the behavioural and attitudinal dimensions of loyalty respectively. On the other hand, the author labelled the outcome variable as WOM activity. This variable captured the frequency at



which WOM messages were generated, the number of people receiving the messages, and the level of detail expressed in those messages. Focusing on the veterinary and hair salon industries, the author reported a positive relationship between affective commitment and WOM activity, and a lack thereof between sacrifice commitment and WOM activity. This finding corroborates the findings of Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) and Carpenter and Fairhurst (2005) cited above.

## **2.8 Quality**

Product quality is another variable that has been suggested as a predictor of consumers' dissemination of WOM. Depending on the field of knowledge in which the concept of product quality has been discussed, different definitions of the concept have been proposed in the literature. Within the field of marketing and consumer behaviour in particular, product quality is widely viewed as "a comparison between expectations and performance" (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985, p. 42). Later, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1994) define quality as "the gap between customers' expectations and perceptions" (p. 111). Comparably, Chaniotakis and Lymperopoulos (2009) view quality as an attitude that arises from a comparison consumers make between their expectations and their perception of the actual product performance. These definitions appear to be tautological with how the concept of customer satisfaction is defined within the disconfirmation paradigm which is widely used in the satisfaction literature. In fact, even the label of the disconfirmation paradigm has its tautological alternative in the quality literature, namely the gap model (Iacobucci, Ostrom, & Grayson, 1995), both of which basically denotes the same thing.

Delineating the boundary between the concepts of satisfaction and quality has been the subject of a debate among researchers (Dmitrovic et al., 2009). This debate primarily addresses the issue of whether the concepts of quality and satisfaction are theoretically identical (i.e., refer to the same construct), or whether they represent two separate constructs. Concurring with the first camp in this debate, De Wulf et al. (2003) define quality literally as "a consumer's level of satisfaction with the merchandise selection offered by a retailer" (p. 249). Adopting a similar point of view, Hartline and Jones (1996) measured service quality with a single-item scale that asked hotel guests to rate how their expectations of the hotel's services compared to the hotel's actual performance. In opposition to this view however, many studies have been carried out that comprised an investigation of the

relationship between satisfaction and quality as two different concepts (see Baker & Crompton, 2000; Chaniotakis & Lymperopoulos, 2009; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Dmitrovic et al., 2009).

Garvin (1984), a proponent of the latter view, argues that in practice, it is highly plausible that a consumer could be satisfied with a product due to the consumer's subjective evaluation of and bias toward certain aspects of the product; nevertheless, the same consumer could still objectively consider the same product to be of inferior quality in comparison with an alternative product. A clearer and more prevalent distinction between the two concepts that was promoted by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) posits that satisfaction is a consumer's response to the evaluation of a single consumption experience and therefore is situation specific; whereas quality is a consumer's judgement that follows the evaluation of cumulative consumption experiences over time.

This micro/macro distinction between satisfaction and quality is in agreement with an important dimension of quality that was mentioned in Pride et al. (2007), namely consistency of quality. Consistency of quality refers to "the degree to which a product has the same level of quality over time" (Pride et al., 2007, p. 343). Nevertheless, the merit of this distinction has been challenged by a macro conceptualisation of satisfaction in which satisfaction is viewed as a long-term attitude toward a brand as opposed to a mere evaluation of a single consumption experience (Anderson & Fornell, 1994). Johnson et al. (1995) refer to this type of satisfaction as cumulative satisfaction, and in Anderson and Fornell (1994), it is referred to as brand satisfaction.

In an attempt to settle the debate regarding the conceptual differences between quality and satisfaction, Iacobucci et al. (1995) presented preliminary evidence that could be interpreted as conciliatory between the two sides of the debate. The authors argue that given the similarity between satisfaction and quality in terms of theoretical underpinnings and consequences, the two share what is known as a nomological network. Specifically, both quality and satisfaction are based on the confirmation or disconfirmation of pre-purchase expectations; and they both function as a prelude to the development of repeat purchase intentions on the part of the consumer. This common nomological network constitutes equivalence between quality and satisfaction, and therefore they should be conceptualised as one concept (Iacobucci et al., 1995).

Through a series of studies that employed both qualitative and experimental designs, the authors found that both quality and satisfaction were preceded by the fulfilment or unfulfillment of expectations; and that both were predictors of consumers' intentions to repurchase. This finding supports the argument that quality and satisfaction might be better treated as a single construct. However, the authors also reported that the two concepts varied in terms of the relationships they have with other variables. Service quality was found to be caused mainly by the price of the service, the expertise of personnel, and the aspects of the service that are not visible to the consumer during the service encounter. Satisfaction on the other hand, was caused by the responsiveness of the personnel, service recovery, and the physical environment in which the service encounter occurred. This finding could be employed to support the argument that quality and satisfaction are two different constructs (Iacobucci et al., 1995).

Based on this latter finding however, the authors conjecture that perhaps quality and satisfaction are two concepts that belong to two different domains of knowledge. They suggest that the three variables that emerged as causes of quality are more likely to be under the direct control of managers. This should consequently make the concept of quality belong to the fields of management, production, or quality control. On the other hand, the three causes of satisfaction identified by the authors are more likely to be experienced and determined by the consumer. Accordingly, this should make the concept of satisfaction belong to the field of marketing and consumer behaviour. Tying this argument to the nomological argument mentioned earlier, the authors argue that a managerial quality control measure that is based on solid market research where consumers' preferences and circumstances are taken into account should eventually correspond to collected data on post-consumption customer satisfaction (Iacobucci et al., 1995).

Within this prevalent conceptualisation of quality which is based on consumers' expectations, different authors have identified different quality attributes. The fulfilment of consumers' expectations in regard to one or more of these attributes determines the level of quality that consumers ascribe to a product. Some of these sets of attributes apply specifically to services, and some are applicable to products in general. The best known quality attributes in the literature were proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) in their widely-used SERVQUAL measurement of service quality. These attributes are tangibility and reliability of the service, the ability of personnel to be responsive, their ability to project

assurance and trust, and their ability to show empathy and personalised attention to consumers (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Garvin (1984) identified the following eight quality attributes: the performance of the product's core characteristics; the performance of the product's non-primary characteristics; the likelihood of the product failing in a specific timeframe (i.e., reliability); the product conformance to pre-established specifications; how long the product lasts before it reaches a point of irreparable failure (durability); how fastly, competently, and courteously a product failure is rectified; the aesthetics of the product; and lastly the purely subjective aspects of the product such as advertising or brand name (Garvin, 1984). Using a lesser number of attributes, Lovett et al. (2013) conceptualise quality exclusively as the product's ability to confer esteem and high social status upon the consumer.

With the utilisation of different conceptualisations, measurements, and attributes of quality, a positive relationship between product quality and consumers' actual and intentional WOM has been reported in previous research. Hartline and Jones (1996) reported a positive effect of the quality of hotel services on the self-reported likelihood of consumers generating positive WOM messages about the hotel. Although, this effect was considerably smaller than the other WOM predictor in the study, namely perceived service value. As indicated earlier, quality in this study was measured in terms of the gap between expectations and performance. Further evidence that was presented by Chaniotakis and Lymperopoulos (2009) from the healthcare industry corroborates the positive effect quality has on consumers' tendency to generate positive WOM messages. The authors utilised the expectations-based view of quality and the SERVQUAL scale of service quality. Of the five attributes that compose the scale, only empathy had a direct positive impact on consumers' intentions to recommend their healthcare provider to their relatives and friends. Particularly, a healthcare provider who shows a genuine interest in understanding the individual needs of their customers proved to be a potent driver of consumers' positive WOM messages in that industry.

In a similar vein, Bloemer, de Ruyter, and Wetzels (1999) investigated the effect of the SERVQUAL five quality attributes on consumers' intentions to disseminate positive WOM messages within four different industries: entertainment, fast food, supermarket, and healthcare. In the entertainment industry, consumers' intentional WOM was predicted

strongly by the responsiveness of the service provider and the tangible aspects of the service. In the fast food industry, intentional WOM was driven mainly by empathy and personalised attention that the service provider offered to consumers; and to a lesser degree, by the sense of trust and assurance conveyed by the service provider. In the supermarket industry, reliability of the service was the sole predictor. In the healthcare industry, consumers' intentional WOM was driven by how empathic and personalised the service was.

Lovett et al. (2013) investigated the relationship between the quality that consumers attach to particular brands and the number of times those brands are mentioned in consumers' conversations both online and offline. The authors measured brand quality in terms of its esteem and its premium price. They found that the higher the esteem of the brand, the more frequently the brand was mentioned in consumers' conversations; both online and offline. For the price aspect of quality, they found a similar positive effect, but only in the online sphere.

## **2.9 Perceived value**

The second-to-last predictor of WOM dissemination reviewed in this chapter is perceived value. Zeithaml (1988) defined customer perceived value as "the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" (p.14). Expressed differently, perceived value is the difference, as perceived by the consumer, between the benefits that the consumer receives from a consumption experience and the costs that the consumer has to expend in order to obtain those benefits (De Matos & Rossi, 2008). These two pillars on which a consumer's value judgement is based could encapsulate a variety of different things. The most obvious sacrifice that the consumer has to expend in a purchase or a consumption episode is the purchase price of the product. In addition, other potential sacrifices could include costs related to maintenance and repairs (Heinonen, 2004). Nevertheless, consumers might also sacrifice non-monetary resources such as time spent in reading advertisements and searching for good bargains, and also the effort that the consumer makes in commuting to a particular store where those bargains are offered (De Matos & Rossi, 2008; Zeithaml, 1988).

In terms of consumption benefits, this could include any aspects of the product that the consumer deem valuable from their perspective (Zeithaml, 1988). However, some

researchers have argued for a number of specific dimensions that are likely to determine the consumer's value judgement. Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991) identified five dimensions of value: functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional. Perceived functional value refers to the utility that the consumer gains from the performance of the product. Durability and reliability were mentioned by the authors as examples of such a utility. Perceived social value refers to a psychological and symbolic association that a particular product or brand might have with a particular social group (Sheth et al., 1991). This social value of consumption enable consumers to express their attachment to and enhance their standing within a particular social group (Pihlstrom, 2008). Thus, such value is most pronounced with easily noticeable products such as cars or clothing (Sheth et al., 1991).

Perceived emotional value refers to the feelings that are provoked in the consumer as a result of consumption. For instance, the feeling of romance is an emotional value that consumers seek to experience by booking a package holiday. Perceived epistemic value is described by Sheth et al. (1991) as the sense of novelty, curiosity, and quest for knowledge that the product evokes in the consumer. Sheth et al. (1991) noted that this value is often sought in the evaluation or consumption of innovative products. Lastly, perceived conditional value is a utility that derives its worth from the specific situation in which the consumer finds themselves in. Examples of products that have conditional value include popcorn at the movies, a wedding dress, and Christmas trees.

Building on these five dimensions of value, Pihlstrom (2008) adopted the five dimensions and added two dimensions: monetary and convenient. Perceived monetary value refers to the price of the product. Perceived convenient value is the least amount of effort, time, and attention that the consumer has to pay in a purchase or consumption experience (Pihlstrom, 2008). Other consumption aspects that could drive the consumer's perception of value can be found in the literature such as the helpfulness of the service provider's personnel (Durvasula, Lysonski, Mehta, & Tang, 2004), the quality and volume of received benefits (De Matos & Rossi, 2008), and the hedonic or utilitarian nature of the product (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

With all the consumption costs and benefits reviewed above, the consumer forms a perception of value by comparing what they lose in order to obtain the product to what they gain from the product. Such perception is likely to be a positive perception of value when

costs are exceeded by benefits and negative when benefits are exceeded by costs (Heinonen, 2004). In both academic and practical research, this is often measured by asking consumers to rate the product they consumed relative to what they spent to get it (Hartline & Jones, 1996; Keiningham, Cooil, Aksoy, Andreassen, & Weiner, 2007; McKee, Simmers, & Licata, 2006). This operationalisation of the concept makes clear the distinction between customer perceived value and other marketing concepts related to value such as the Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) (Pihlstrom, 2008). CLV refers to an estimated monetary value that is expected to be gained from a single customer over a period of time (Kumar et al., 2010). This monetary contribution to a company's net profits stems from collected data pertaining to the intentions of the company's loyal customers in terms of repeat purchases and recommendations to other consumers. Thus, CLV focuses on value that is gained by the provider of goods and services, whereas customer perceived value focuses on value that is gained by the consumer. Additionally, CLV is more objectively calculated, whereas customer perceived value is a subjective judgement of the consumer.

Based on the forgoing and brief review of customer perceived value, it can be intuitively noticed that there seems to be an overlap between this concept and other marketing concepts, some of which have already been reviewed in this chapter. The concept of customer satisfaction stands out in this regard. Specifically, the comparison between consumption gains and sacrifices which drives consumers' value judgements is the same as the comparison process that determines consumers' satisfaction. As stated earlier in Section 2.2, the comparison standard that is central to the disconfirmation paradigm can focus on weighing up the costs and benefits of an exchange transaction in order to determine the fairness of the exchange; and that ultimately shapes the level of consumers' satisfaction. This comparison standard that guides consumers' satisfaction seems identical to the comparison standard that shapes consumers' perceived value.

Notwithstanding the above-stated conceptual overlap, a positive relationship between customer perceived positive value and consumers' propensity to generate positive WOM has been reported in the literature. To explain this positive association, authors such as Pura (2005), McKee et al. (2006), and De Matos and Rossi (2008) invoked the idea of consumers' commitment. They argue that a consumer's perception of value develops a sense of commitment towards the provider of the product. This commitment subsequently gets reflected in the consumer's behaviour of recommending the product to others. Hartline and

Jones (1996) found strong empirical support for this positive relationship in the lodging industry. Among housekeeping services, perceived service quality, and perceived service value, the latter was by far the strongest predictor of consumers' intentional WOM.

Durvasula et al. (2004) corroborated this finding in a study of the life insurance industry in Singapore. The authors investigated the causal links between three variables and consumers' willingness to recommend the product to others. Those variables were service quality, customers' satisfaction with the service, and customers' perceived value of the service. Path analysis revealed the variable of perceived value as the only variable that had a strong and direct influence on consumers' willingness to recommend. Further evidence was found by Gruen et al. (2006). The authors reported a strong and positive impact of consumers' perceived value of video editing software on their intentions to recommend the software to others. Moreover, Pihlstrom and Brush (2008) investigated the effect of six dimensions of value on three loyalty behaviours of consumers in the mobile services industry; one of the studied loyalty behaviours was disseminating WOM messages. The authors found a positive effect of the emotional perceived value on consumers' propensity to generate positive WOM messages about the service provider. They also found a positive link between the perceived social value and the propensity to generate WOM; particularly when the mobile service pertained to entertainment such as ring-tones and java games, as opposed to news-related services such as weather reports and the news.

## **2.10 Hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption**

It is argued in this thesis that a re-conceptualisation of WOM should entail a revision of the roles that different product typologies play in the explanation of consumers' WOM. The main product typology utilised in the current research is the hedonic/utilitarian typology. The effect of hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption on consumers' tendency to generate WOM messages has not received adequate attention in previous research. Due to this gap, this section of the literature review is devoted to these two types of consumption. They are the last predictors of WOM dissemination reviewed in this chapter.

Research on the hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption traces its roots to the 1970s and 80s (Fiore & Kim, 2007). Up until the late 1970s, the dominant view of consumption was that of a rational consumer who is assumed to regard purchase and consumption decisions as problem-solving activities where utility ought to be carefully calculated and maximised



(Fiore & Kim, 2007; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). In the 1980s however, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) argued for an experiential perspective of consumption that is more emotional in nature. These two views are considered respectively the theoretical origins of the utilitarian and hedonic types of consumption. In utilitarian consumption, the consumer has some functional needs that have to be fulfilled pragmatically and practically (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Okada, 2005). In hedonic consumption, the consumer seeks to satiate his or her urge to have fun, exciting and gratifying moments (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Okada, 2005).

Several distinctions between these two types of consumption have been identified in previous research. Perhaps the primary distinction between hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption is their intrinsic nature. Hedonic consumption is viewed as experiential and multi-sensory, whereas utilitarian consumption is viewed as instrumental and practical (Chernev, 2004; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). In hedonic consumption, the consumer receives intangible affective benefits such as excitement, fun, and aesthetics. On the other hand, utilitarian consumption provides the consumer with functional and more task-related benefits such as usefulness, practicality, and efficiency (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Chaudhuri, 2002; O'Curry & Strahilevitz, 2001). Therefore, hedonic benefits are "sought for their own sake", whereas utilitarian benefits are considered as "a means to an end" (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000, p. 56). In a similar fashion, hedonic consumption has been described as intrinsic (Pihlstrom, 2008) and consummatory (Pham, 1998) in nature; whereas utilitarian consumption has been described as extrinsic and instrumental.

Another dimension to describe hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption is their level of discretion. It is suggested in the literature that hedonic consumption and utilitarian consumption are both discretionary in the sense that both depend on the consumer's perception (Okada, 2005). Nevertheless, this notion is also followed by the argument that hedonic consumption is more discretionary than its utilitarian counterpart (Khan, Dhar, & Wertenbroch, 2004; Okada, 2005). Hedonic consumption tends to be more personal and subjective than utilitarian consumption (Babin et al., 1994; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Additionally, experience in its own right is a subjective construct (Chan, 2010). Moreover, hedonic consumption is congruent with an imaginative reality that is internally constructed by the consumer (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Therefore, feelings play a significant role in hedonic consumption; and hence consumers' perceptions about this type of consumption

tend to be more discretionary. On the other hand, because utilitarian consumption focuses on instrumental benefits, objective calculation of the benefits tends to assume greater importance (Chan, 2010). Additionally, imaginative reality cannot be constructed in utilitarian consumption because this type of consumption tends to be congruent with the more objective world outside the consumer's feelings (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Thus, the level of personal discretion in utilitarian consumption in regards to consumers' perceptions tends to be less than that in hedonic consumption.

Another distinction between hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption can be found in the distinct types of pre-purchase evaluation they call for. It has been proposed in the literature that hedonic consumption requires emotional evaluation, whereas utilitarian consumption requires rational evaluation (Arnold & Reynolds, 2009; Chaudhuri, 2006). In addition, since hedonic benefits are experiential in nature, they are difficult to quantify (Okada, 2005). Therefore, in order for such benefits to be evaluated prior to making the purchase decision, the expected consumption experience must be preceded by a state of emotional arousal or intense affection (Chaudhuri, 2006; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). In contrast, because utilitarian benefits are instrumental, evaluation of such benefits is akin to a calculative process that is free of emotional arousal (Chaudhuri, 2006). Hence, when evaluating a prospective utilitarian consumption, the consumer acts as a rational problem solver (Arnold & Reynolds, 2009; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982).

Furthermore, benefits received in a hedonic consumption have been described in the literature as "monovalent satisfiers", whereas those received in a utilitarian consumption have been described as "bivalent satisfiers" (Jones et al., 2006, p. 975). That is, utilitarian benefits can bring about both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, whereas hedonic benefits can bring about satisfaction only (Arnold & Reynolds, 2009; Jones et al., 2006). In other words, when consumers achieve the goals of their hedonic consumption, they are said to have gained something; and when they fail to achieve those hedonic goals, they are said to have failed to gain something. However, when consumers achieve the goals of their utilitarian consumption, they are said to have avoided a loss; and when they fail to achieve those utilitarian goals, they are said to have lost something.

The relationship between hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption on one hand and the tendency to generate WOM messages has been empirically investigated by only a few

studies. The findings reported in these few studies diverge into different directions. Babin, Lee, Kim, and Griffin (2005) explored, among other things, the hedonic and utilitarian aspects of a dining experience and the influence of these aspects on consumer satisfaction and WOM recommendation. They argued and empirically demonstrate that the hedonic and utilitarian elements of a dining experience have positive relationships with intentions to generate WOM recommendations. Nevertheless, this positive effect was stronger when the consumption experience was perceived as utilitarian compared to when it was perceived as hedonic. Contrariwise, Arnold and Reynolds (2009) investigated the relationship between hedonic and utilitarian aspects of a shopping trip experience and intentional WOM dissemination. The authors reported positive effects of both types of consumption on the outcome variable. However, the effect was stronger when the consumption experience was perceived as hedonic.

In their seminal study, Jones et al. (2006) investigated the relationships between the hedonic and utilitarian aspects of a shopping trip on one hand and the shoppers' intentions to spread WOM on the other hand. They hypothesised that hedonic as well as utilitarian elements of the shopping trip would have positive relationships with consumers' intentions to spread WOM messages. Nevertheless, their results indicated that while the shopping episode had the predicted effect when it was rated as hedonic, a positive effect was not detected when the shopping trip was rated as utilitarian. Correspondingly, Alsulaiman et al. (2015) tested the relationships between the two consumption types and consumers' actual WOM dissemination using goods and services that spanned a range of different industries. The authors found a strong positive effect between hedonic consumption and WOM dissemination, but none from utilitarian consumption. Similar findings were also reported by Shih, Lai, and Cheng (2013) who focused on consumers' intentions to recommend an online discussion forum to others. They found that consumers form intentions to recommend when they develop an affective attitude toward the forum. However, when consumers hold a cognitive attitude toward the forum, no effect on the intentions to recommend was detected.

The contrast between hedonic consumption and utilitarian consumption can also be found reflected in the regulatory focus theory. The theory focuses on how individuals identify, approach and achieve their goals (Zhang, Craciun, & Shin, 2010). The theory contends that individuals approach their goals via two different motivational systems; a promotion system

and a prevention system. In the promotion system, individuals are concerned with goals that are related to the individuals' aspirations, hopes, advancement and growth(Higgins, 2001; Idson, Liberman, & Higgins, 2000). In the prevention system, individuals are concerned with goals that are related to their security, protection, obligations and duties.It has been empirically demonstrated that the promotion regulatory system is compatible with hedonic consumption, but not with utilitarian consumption. It has also been empirically demonstrated that the prevention regulatory system is compatible with utilitarian consumption, but not with hedonic consumption(Arnold & Reynolds, 2009; Chernev, 2004).

Indeed, some of the aforesaid characteristics of hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption seem to have parallels in the promotion and prevention regulatory systems. For instance, individuals with promotion goals have an inclination for exploration and creativity, and they tend to use feelings during evaluation. On the other hand, individuals with prevention goals have an inclination for analytical thinking and rational evaluation(Pham & Chang, 2010; Werth & Foerster, 2007; Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2007). These tendencies are due to the premise that individuals in a promotion situation view the situation as benign and unlikely to do them harm; hence, they are likely to explore. Opposite to this view, individuals in a prevention situation view it as problematic, and that it could do them harm; hence, they are likely to be more analytical(Arnold & Reynolds, 2009; Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2007).

Due to this difference, individuals in the two systems differ in how they process information. It has been reported in the literature that individuals in the promotion system tend to process information at a global and abstract level, in which different pieces of information are heuristically integrated in one or more general themes(Arnold & Reynolds, 2009). Conversely, individuals in the prevention system process information at a more concrete and specific level, in which single pieces of information are analytically assessed in isolation(Arnold & Reynolds, 2009; Pham & Chang, 2010; Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2007).

Moreover, the goals that individuals are motivated to pursue in the promotion and prevention systems engender different mechanisms. Individuals in the promotion system focus primarily on how to achieve positive outcomes, whereas individuals in the prevention system focus their attention on how to avoid negative outcomes(Chernev, 2004; Higgins, 2001; Trudel, Murray, & Cotte, 2012). Therefore, individuals pursue promotion goals with eagerness and enthusiasm, whereas prevention goals tend to be pursued cautiously and

vigilantly(Higgins, 2001; Idson et al., 2000). The eagerness in the promotion system functions as a means to ensure that every gain possibility will be explored. On the other hand, the vigilance in the prevention system ensures no losses will be incurred(Higgins, 2001).

Accordingly, and similar to hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption, individuals in a promotion situation tend to view the achievement and non-achievement of their goals as gain and non-gain respectively. Alternatively, individuals in a prevention situation tend to view the achievement and non-achievement of their goals as non-loss and loss respectively(Arnold & Reynolds, 2009; Trudel et al., 2012). Moreover, promotion goals have been described in the literature as maximal goals, whereas prevention goals have been considered as minimal goals(Aaker & Lee, 2001; Chitturi, Raghunathan, & Mahajan, 2007). One difference between maximal goals and minimal goals is that while maximal goals are hoped to be met, minimal goals must be met(Idson et al., 2000).

Furthermore, the differential impact of promotion and prevention goals on emotion is similar to that of hedonism and utilitarianism (Aaker & Lee, 2001). The success of achieving promotion goals is likely to result in feelings of cheerfulness, excitement, and arousal, whereas the achievement of prevention goals may yield feelings of quiescence, calmness and relaxation(Chitturi et al., 2007; Higgins, 2001; Idson et al., 2000). Unlike prevention goals, the success in achieving promotion goals tend to be accompanied with affective arousal and intense emotions(Higgins, 2001; Idson et al., 2000). This is because satisfaction in a promotion situation tends to depend on the presence of positive outcomes, whereas satisfaction in a prevention situation tends to depend on the absence of negative outcomes(Chitturi et al., 2007).

This notion was empirically demonstrated by Idson et al. (2000)in a number of experiments. In one of these experiments, participants were asked to imagine they were sitting in a restaurant waiting for their check to pay for their dining experience. Four manipulations were created. In the first two manipulations, participants read on their check that they will get a five dollars discount if they pay in cash, and they decide to pay in cash. In the first manipulation, participants realise they actually have enough cash to pay. In the second manipulation, participants realise they do not have enough cash, and therefore, they would have to use their credit card. Subsequently, participants were asked how they would feel about being able to get the discount, and how they would feel about not being able to get

the discount. These two manipulations represent the success and failure in achieving a promotion goal (i.e., gain and non-gain)(Idson et al., 2000).

In the third and fourth manipulations, participants read on their check that there will be an extra charge of five dollars if they choose to pay in credit, and they decide to pay in cash. In the third manipulation, participants realise they have enough cash to pay. In the fourth manipulation, participants realise they do not have enough cash, and therefore, they would have to use their credit card. Thus, they would have to pay the extra charge. Afterwards, participants were asked how they would feel about being able to avoid paying the extra charge, and how they would feel about having to pay the extra charge. The third and fourth manipulations represent the success and failure in achieving a prevention goal (i.e., non-loss and loss) (Idson et al., 2000). The experimenters found that the pleasure the participants would feel from being able to get the discount was greater than the pleasure they would feel from being able to avoid paying the extra five dollars charge. In other words, “the pleasure of a gain is stronger than the pleasure of a non-loss”(Idson et al., 2000, p. 260).

In summary, there are a number of specific distinctions between hedonic consumption and utilitarian consumption. Hedonic consumption is sought for its own sake, whereas utilitarian consumption is a means to an end. Consumers' perception about a hedonic consumption is more subjective, whereas in a utilitarian consumption, it is likely to be more objective. Hedonic consumption experiences are likely to be evaluated emotionally. Conversely, the consumption of utilitarian products is likely to be evaluated rationally. The consumption of utilitarian products can result in either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In contrast, the consumption of hedonic products is not likely to lead to dissatisfaction even. Consumers in a hedonic situation are primarily concerned with how to achieve a positive outcome. In opposition, consumers in a utilitarian situation are primarily concerned with how to avoid a negative outcome. Additionally, consumers in a hedonic situation tend to process information in an abstract manner. Alternatively, consumers in a utilitarian situation tend to process information in a specific and concise manner.

### 3 Theoretical Framework

Chapter One of this thesis explained the difficulty of predicting and influencing the consumers' behaviour of generating positive WOM messages. Chapter One also reviewed the practices and techniques used by marketing professionals to overcome that difficulty. Additionally, it was argued in Chapter One that those practices need to be strengthened with additional ideas. Furthermore, the chapter also elucidated the need for a new theoretical framework that facilitates a better understanding of WOM dissemination. In an attempt to fulfil this need, the current chapter introduces a new theoretical framework that could enhance the ability of marketing professionals to predict and influence this important consumer behaviour.

The proposed framework is different from existing frameworks in a number of aspects. First, instead of viewing the behaviour of generating a WOM message as one phenomenon, the framework argues that this behaviour spans three distinct phenomena, each of which is likely to have distinct predictors. This is different from the dominant view in the literature which considers this behaviour as a single phenomenon across different circumstances. Second, while aiming to provide a tool to predict consumers' dissemination of WOM, the framework also seeks to achieve parsimony by including the minimum number of predictors possible without compromising its theoretical potency and inclusivity. Breaking up the behaviour of disseminating WOM into three separate categories narrows down the number of constructs that predict each category, which might result in a more effective yet more parsimonious prediction of the behaviour. Third, the framework suggests new criteria to determine whether a construct should be utilised as a WOM predictor or as a conditioning or a moderating construct. A conditioning construct is expected to make one WOM predictor more salient in predicting a WOM outcome relative to another WOM predictor, whereas a moderating construct is expected to influence the strength of the relationship between a WOM predictor and a WOM outcome. Finally, the framework aims to be as inclusive as possible. Included in that is the effect of hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption on WOM dissemination and also the applicability of the framework in both the offline and online spheres.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first contains a re-conceptualisation of positive WOM dissemination into three separate categories. The second introduces two criteria;

the first criterion determines which of the constructs reviewed in Chapter Two are either included in or excluded from the framework, and the second determines whether a construct is treated as a predictor construct, as a conditioning construct, or as a moderating construct. The proposed framework is introduced at the end of Section Two. The third section outlines the predictors of the first two WOM categories, and explains the logical arguments underpinning these relationships. This section also introduces the conditioning and moderating constructs by which the predictions of the first two WOM categories are expected to vary. The fourth section focuses on the prediction of the third WOM category. Theoretical propositions are posited across the third and fourth sections.

### **3.1 WOM re-conceptualisation**

It was argued in Section 1.3.2 that refining the concept of WOM dissemination could lead to a better understanding and better prediction of this behaviour. The need for this refinement represents the genesis of the theoretical framework proposed in the current chapter. In Chapter One, positive WOM dissemination was defined as the consumer's conveyance of their endorsement of a particular brand or product to other consumers. Invoking the prototype theory, it is argued here that this view of positive WOM dissemination portrays this concept as a basic level concept. According to the prototype theory, things can be conceptualised at three levels of generality; superordinate, basic, and subordinate (Rosch & Mervis, 1975; Rosch, Mervis, Gray, Johnson, & Boyes-Braem, 1976). At the top is the superordinate level followed by the basic level and then the subordinate level at the bottom. The level of generality and inclusiveness of a concept decreases as the level of conceptualisation moves downward. Thus, a concept that is defined at the superordinate level tends to be general and inclusive. In other words, such a concept or category tends to subsume several subcategories within it. A superordinate category is also said to be at such a high level of generality that members within the category have only few attributes in common.

The subcategories that are encapsulated within a superordinate category are referred to in the prototype theory as basic-level categories. They represent the middle level of conceptualisation. At this level, a category's degree of inclusiveness starts to decrease. However, attributes that are specific to that category begin to formulate across different members of the category and be readily discerned. Within this basic level, another set of



subcategories exists. These tier-three subcategories represent the subordinate level of conceptualisation. At this level, more attributes can be identified whose degree of specificity render subordinate categories the least inclusive. Despite the high level of specificity at this conceptualisation level, common attributes across the subordinate categories tend to counterbalance the differences (Rosch et al., 1976).

The taxonomy of the prototype theory outlined above can be explained further with examples. The word “vehicles” is a label that denotes a superordinate concept. Encapsulated within that superordinate category are a number of subcategories such as cars, motorcycles, trucks, and airplanes. These can be regarded as basic-level categories on their own right (Rosch et al., 1976). The concept of vehicles conveys fewer attributes that are common to all vehicles compared to the concept of cars conferring common attributes to all cars. Further refinement of the concept of vehicles can be reached by refining one of the concept’s basic-level categories. For instance, third tiers categories such as four-door sedan, two-door sedan, and minivan can be specified to reach that level of conceptualisation. These tier-three subcategories represent subordinate-level concepts (Tversky & Hemenway, 1984). While each of the different subcategories of cars has its own specific attributes, all cars have more in common than the subtle differences that set them apart.

A comparison between the three levels of conceptualisation led Rosch et al. (1976) and others such as Tversky and Hemenway (1984) to assign perceptual salience to concepts at the basic level as opposed to the superordinate and subordinate levels. This primacy was demonstrated in a series of experiments conducted by Rosch et al. (1976). In one of these experiments, participants were shown pictures of different objects in succession. For each picture, participants were required to write down a word that typifies the object. It was found that participants tended to choose labels that define the objects at the basic level more frequently than the other levels (i.e., superordinate and subordinate). For example, a picture of a table was identified as a table (i.e., basic-level category) more often than being identified as furniture (i.e., superordinate category) (Rosch et al., 1976).

In another experiment, participants first listened to a word that defined a particular object at one of the three conceptualisation levels. Examples of such words included animal, bird, and robin which denoted respectively the superordinate, the basic, and the subordinate levels of conceptualisation. After the audio presentation of the word, participants were presented

with a picture of an object. Their task was to indicate whether the picture was the epitome of the category that the word referred to. Additionally, the time it took participants to make that indication was measured. The analytic results revealed that participants spent the shortest amount of time in matching a picture to a basic-level label in comparison to superordinate and subordinate labels (Rosch et al., 1976). Similar experiments were replicated by Tversky and Hemenway (1984) whose findings corroborated those of Rosch et al. (1976). As pointed out by a number of researchers, these findings seem to be in line with the findings that basic-level concepts or categories enter children's lexicon before those that are defined at the superordinate and subordinate levels (Mervis & Rosch, 1981; Wisniewski & Murphy, 1989).

The taxonomy of the prototype theory can be utilised to refine the behaviour of disseminating positive WOM messages as a concept. As quoted in Chapter One, WOM in general has been defined as "communication between a non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a brand, a product, or a service offered for sale" (Lang, 2010, p. 33). It is argued here that this definition is a conceptualisation of WOM at the superordinate level. Within this general and inclusive superordinate category, a few subcategories are subsumed such as disseminating positive WOM, disseminating negative WOM, and requesting WOM. Additionally, disseminating positive WOM has been defined here as the consumer's conveyance of their endorsement of a particular brand or product to other consumers. It is therefore argued that this definition represents a basic-level conceptualisation of WOM. Thus, the WOM literature seems to be lacking further refinement of WOM dissemination at the subordinate level.

This researcher is of the opinion that the argument for the primacy of basic-level conceptualisations holds true in terms of everyday human perceptual processes. However, such primacy might be untenable in academic conceptualisations in which the emphasis is placed on ontological specificity (Churchill, 1979; Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010). This argument seems to find support from within the literature of the prototype theory itself. Rosch et al. (1976) speculated that the special status of basic-level categories might be rivalled by subordinate categories when the perceiver is an expert on the perceived object. Such speculation was later empirically confirmed by Tanaka and Taylor (1991). Tanaka and Taylor (1991) replicated the experiments cited above from Rosch et al. (1976) while also taking into account the expertise of participants. The authors hypothesised that experts would use

subordinate labels to define objects as frequently as they use basic-level labels. Similarly, experts would likely be faster in matching a picture of an object to a subordinate label compared to non-experts. The authors reasoned that the detailed knowledge which experts possess about a particular domain should make them more likely to see and define that domain from a subordinate-level perspective as opposed to superordinate or basic levels.

Using a sample that included experts on dogs and experts on birds, the hypotheses were empirically supported. The recruited dog experts did not possess expertise in the bird domain, and the recruited bird experts did not possess expertise in the dog domain. This allowed the experimenters to treat each type of experts as novices in the other's domain. All participants were shown pictures of different breeds of birds and dogs, and then asked to name the object in the picture. In fifty-seven per cent of the incidents, experts used subordinate labels such as Cardinal, Sparrow, Jay, or Robin to describe the pictures of birds; and to describe the pictures of dogs, they used labels such as Doberman Pinscher, German Shepherd, Cocker Spaniel, or Beagle. Comparatively, experts resorted to basic-level labels for forty-three per cent of their opportunities. Furthermore, when they participated as novices, participants used basic-level labels for seventy-six per cent and subordinate labels only twenty-one per cent of the photographs (Tanaka & Taylor, 1991).

In another experiment, the same experts who participated in the previous experiment were presented with pictures of different breeds of birds and dogs multiple times. Every picture was also combined with a label that purportedly defined that picture. These labels spanned the three levels of conceptualisation (i.e., superordinate, basic, and subordinate). The participants' task was to indicate whether the picture-label combination was true or false. The authors found no difference between the time it took experts to identify a true combination at the subordinate level and the time they needed to identify a true combination at the basic level. Novices, however, needed a longer time to identify a true combination at the subordinate level compared to one at the basic level (Tanaka & Taylor, 1991).

Along with marketing specialists, marketing theoreticians are the experts of the marketing discipline. Thus, when devising theories to explain the concept of disseminating WOM and how it relates to other concepts, marketing academics and theoreticians would be particularly apt to view this concept specifically from a subordinate angle. Indeed, devising

refined conceptualisations of the phenomena they investigate is a fundamental part of their role as social scientists (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010). Jaccard and Jacoby (2010) refer to such refinement as the process of instantiation, and described it as “a deliberate process that involves specifying concrete instances of abstract concepts in order to help clarify their meaning” (p. 76).

Several examples of conceptual refinement can be found in the literature. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) for instance presented an extensive literature review of the concept of attitude. After analysing more than five hundred definitions of this concept, they put forward an argument that three separate constructs can be detected from the definitions they reviewed; beliefs, feelings, and behavioural intentions. Moreover, they argued that each of the three attitude types have different sets of predictors. The concept of perceived risk is another example of a similar conceptual refinement. Early conceptualisations of perceived risk viewed the concept generally as the level of uncertainty in anticipating the consequences of an action (Bauer, 1967). However, a refined view of this concept was subsequently suggested by Jacoby and Kaplan (1972) in which they argued that perceived risk is a function of the setting in which this phenomenon occurs. Accordingly, they identified four subcategories of perceived risk; physical, monetary, social, and moral.

Aiming to provide a refined conceptualisation of WOM dissemination at the subordinate level, the current research contextualises this concept by following guidelines that were put forward by Jaccard and Jacoby (2010). They argued that within social science, most instances of people’s social behaviour have four properties: an action, an object, a time, and a setting. The action property concerns the core behavioural phenomenon that the researcher is investigating; the object is the target of the action; the time property refers to when the action occurs; and the setting refers to the context in which the action transpires. Applying these properties on the behaviour of disseminating WOM messages, the action property is realised when the consumer generates a WOM message. An object of that action could be the product that the message talks about, or it could be the person to whom the message is directed. The action and the object properties are not utilised here in the refinement of WOM dissemination. Rather, the remaining two properties (time and setting) are employed to make two distinctions that have not received much contemplation in previous WOM research.

The first distinction is related to the timing property. The vast majority of WOM research seems to presuppose that the behaviour of generating a WOM message is always a post-consumption behaviour. The current research argues that this behaviour can also occur pre-consumption. This view finds anecdotal support in the buzz that usually precedes the launch of some products such as a new smart phone or a new movie of a popular Hollywood star. Also, indirect support for this view can be found in some WOM definitions suggested in previous research. One example is the definition put forward by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) who described WOM communication in general as a “statement made by potential, actual, or former customers” (p. 39). The second distinction is related to the setting property. It revolves around whether the WOM message is generated voluntarily or whether it was primarily a reply to a request for advice. Voluntary messages are generated without being preceded by a request for advice. On the contrary, solicited WOM messages have to be preceded by an explicit request for advice. Otherwise, they are unlikely to be generated.

Based on the two distinctions noted above, the concept of generating WOM is split into three separate categories: generating unsolicited pre-consumption WOM, generating unsolicited post-consumption WOM, and generating solicited WOM. The first is defined as the consumer’s unrequested conveyance of their endorsement of a particular brand or product to another consumer before consumption. The second is defined as the consumer’s unrequested conveyance of their endorsement of a particular brand or product to another consumer after consumption. The third is defined as the consumer’s conveyance of their endorsement of a particular brand or product to another consumer after receiving a request for advice. Distinguishing between generating solicited pre-consumption WOM and generating solicited post-consumption WOM was deemed unnecessary and inconsequential. This is so because in generating solicited WOM, the request for advice is the main driver of generating the WOM message. In other words, absent an explicit request for advice, the WOM message is unlikely to be generated. Hence, in this case the distinction between generating solicited pre-consumption WOM and generating solicited post-consumption WOM is irrelevant.

### **3.2 Constructs included in the framework and their roles**

Chapter Two presented a review of ten constructs that have been cited in previous research in the prediction of WOM dissemination. The majority of these ten constructs are utilised as

the building blocks of the theoretical framework that is proposed in this thesis. However, the framework assigns different roles to these constructs instead of treating them uniformly as WOM predictors. This differential assignment is warranted because of the re-conceptualisation of WOM dissemination into three different categories. Additionally, this differential assignment of roles is in line with the research goal of presenting a practical and parsimonious framework of WOM dissemination.

In order to organise the constructs reviewed in Chapter Two into a new theoretical framework, this section presents two separate criteria. The first criterion determines which of the constructs reviewed in Chapter Two are to be excluded from the framework. The second criterion assigns the role that each of the remaining constructs is expected to play within the framework. In that regard, some constructs function as WOM predictors, whilst others are included as conditioning or moderating constructs. Conditioning constructs are expected to influence the relative power of WOM predictors in predicting an outcome category of WOM dissemination, whereas moderators influence the strength of the relationship between a WOM predictor and a WOM outcome category.

### **3.2.1 First criterion**

A construct is not included in the theoretical framework if it seems to have a plausible conceptual overlap with another construct in the framework. As shown in Chapter Two, there is a variety of constructs that have been used in the prediction of WOM dissemination. Some of these constructs seem to overlap in the way they are defined or operationalised despite their different labels. This overlap has indeed been noticed by WOM researchers such as Bristor (1990). Given the abstract level at which theoretical frameworks are envisaged, conceptual overlap between WOM-related constructs was judged by examining the definitions of these constructs at face value. Of the ten constructs reviewed in Chapter Two, three were identified, each of which appeared to be ontologically similar to other constructs and therefore were not included in the framework as constructs of their own. However, the aspects and meanings that underlie these three constructs are argued to be accounted for through other constructs in the framework. These three constructs are consumer loyalty, quality, and perceived value. The following paragraphs explain why these three constructs are excluded.

First, as explained in Section 2.7, research has identified two dimensions by which loyalty was conceptualised; attitudinal and behavioural. The attitudinal component involves the cultivation of a positive emotional or psychological disposition on the part of the consumer toward a particular brand (Marshall, 2010). This psychological attachment tends to extend for a prolonged period of time (De Matos & Rossi, 2008), resulting in the consumer becoming an expert on the brand and its products. Furthermore, this positive long-term disposition toward the brand tends over time to fuse with the consumer's sense of who they are (Park et al., 2010). It is argued here that, seen through the prism of this attitudinal dimension, the construct of loyalty seems to overlap conceptually with the construct of involvement, particularly enduring involvement. As explained previously in Section 2.1, a consumer is likely to develop a sense of enduring involvement with a product or a brand when they have an ongoing interest in such objects (Houston & Rothschild, 1978). This ongoing involvement tends to result in the consumer accumulating knowledge about and experience with the product or brand that gripped their interest. Additionally, this involvement is likely to become relevant to the consumer's ego and to their sense of who they are. Moreover, consumption of a particular product is not necessary for the consumer to be regarded as loyal or enduringly involved.

Furthermore, it is argued here that making a cogent argument for an association between loyalty and WOM dissemination seems untenable when the construct of loyalty is seen through the prism of the behavioural dimension. As explained earlier, the behavioural dimension of loyalty refers to purchasing the same product from the same brand consistently over time (Gremler & Brown, 1996). Absent any psychological connection between the consumer and the product or its brand, repeat purchases persist over time when switching costs are high or when switching to another product entails inconvenient technical or psychological changes (Selnes, 1993). Seen from this perspective, arguing for an association between the behavioural dimension of loyalty and WOM dissemination seems a rather untenable task. Empirical evidence from Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) and from Harrison-Walker (2001), cited in Section 2.7, seems to lend support to this view.

Second, the debate concerning a conceptual overlap between the constructs of quality and satisfaction was laid bare in Section 2.8. Within that debate, several definitions were cited that clearly attest to the overlap between quality and satisfaction and more specifically between quality and consumers' expectations (De Wulf et al., 2003; Hartline & Jones, 1996).

Due to this overlap, the inclusion of the construct of quality in the framework is deemed a duplication, as its effect is accounted for through the construct of satisfaction and the disconfirmation paradigm.

Third, Section 2.9 presented a description of perceived value as the result of a comparison that the consumer makes between consumption benefits and costs (De Matos & Rossi, 2008). This comparison process is not different from the comparison standard of the disconfirmation paradigm that is central in determining consumers' satisfaction. Accordingly, this constitutes a clear conceptual overlap between the construct of perceived value and the construct of satisfaction, more specifically between perceived value and consumers' expectations. Furthermore, the specific types of value dimensions that have been identified in previous research point to another overlap with the construct of consumption type. Particularly, the functional and convenient dimensions of value seem to be identical to the utilitarian type of consumption. Perceived functional value is the utility that the consumer gains from the performance of a product (Sheth et al., 1991). Perceived convenience value is a judgement of effort, time, and attention paid by the consumer to obtain a product (Pihlstrom, 2008). These two value dimensions are not different from the view of utilitarian consumption as an instrumental and practical experience in which functional and task-related benefits are obtained (Chaudhuri, 2002).

By the same token, the emotional dimension of value seems to have a high degree of resemblance to the hedonic type of consumption. Perceived emotional value refers to the feelings that are provoked in the customer as a result of consumption (Sheth et al., 1991). Similarly, hedonic consumption is a multisensory experience in which intangible affective benefits are obtained (O'Curry & Strahilevitz, 2001). Therefore, due to the overlap between the construct of perceived value and other constructs, perceived value is not included in the framework as a separate construct. Nevertheless, its ontological constituents are taken into account within the framework through other constructs such as consumers' expectations and consumption types.

### **3.2.2 Second criterion**

Of the ten constructs reviewed in Chapter Two, three were not included in the theoretical framework. The following criterion applies to the remaining seven constructs that are included in the framework. A construct functions as a WOM predictor if it is considered



situational in nature. Alternatively, a construct is included in the framework as a conditioning or as a moderating construct if it is thought to be dispositional in nature.

A construct is deemed dispositional when the consumer's expression of the construct is attributed to the consumer's personality. In contrast, a construct is regarded as situational if the consumer's manifestation of the construct is attributed to the environment or the context of the consumer. Categorising the constructs according to these conditions is appropriate because the goal of the proposed framework is practicality and gaining the capability to influence consumers' dissemination of WOM. Consumers' personality traits and attitudes are more difficult to change and influence than their situations (Assael et al., 2007). Accordingly, dispositional constructs are likely to be less susceptible to external influence. Therefore, it seems logical and practical to treat the more influenceable situational constructs as WOM predictors and to treat the less influenceable dispositional constructs as conditioning or moderating constructs.

The two categories identified above originate from the literature of the attribution theory which maintains that people tend to explain a particular human behaviour by attributing it to either dispositional or personal factors (Gilbert, 1998). For example, to explain why a person is behaving in an anxious manner, an observer might conclude that being anxious is part of that person's personality. This is dispositional attribution. Alternatively, the observer might conclude that the anxious behaviour is due to an imminent visit to the dentist. This constitutes a situational attribution (Gilbert, 1998). Within the WOM literature, a similar categorisation was proposed by Mazzarol et al. (2007). The authors argue for the need to distinguish between factors that trigger WOM which are situational in nature and conditioning factors that moderate the triggers' effect on WOM dissemination. They describe conditioning factors as characteristics of the WOM sender, the WOM receiver, or the product.

The following sub-sections revisit the seven constructs that are included in the framework in order to determine which construct has a predictive role and which has a conditioning or a moderating role. Four specific characteristics are employed in order to make these determinations. First, a behaviour or an action is described as dispositional if it occurs out of free choice and of the actor's own volition (Jones & Davis, 1965). Second, dispositions that are chosen freely entail the actor's predilection toward them. Third, preferable dispositions

that are freely chosen are stable over time. Fourth, dispositions tend to be related to people's sense of self and identity (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). This contrasts with a situational behaviour that is restricted by a specific situation, might not match the actor's preference, might not reoccur overtime, and might not be related to the actor's self and identity. The definitions of the constructs that are included in the framework are examined in light of the four characteristics mentioned above.

### **3.2.2.1 Consumer involvement**

As explained in Section 2.1, there are two types of involvement: enduring and situational. It is argued here that enduring involvement is a dispositional phenomenon. The genesis of the consumer's enduring involvement stems from within the personal interests of the consumer (Houston & Rothschild, 1978), as opposed to being imposed on the consumer by external forces in the environment. This makes the consumer's attitudinal and behavioural manifestation of this phenomenon something that is freely chosen. This also entails that the consumer has a favourable attitude toward the involvement object (e.g., the product or the brand). Furthermore, enduring involvement is by definition likely to remain constantly at a high level for a long time (Taylor et al., 2012). Moreover, enduring involvement is often related to the consumer's ego and sense of self (Houston & Rothschild, 1978). Based on the four characteristics outlined above, enduring involvement is deemed dispositional in nature; and accordingly, the construct of enduring involvement functions as a conditioning and a moderating construct in the framework.

On the other hand, situational involvement arises when a specific situation prompts an individual to be temporarily involved with an object that was not among the individual's interests prior to the situation (Houston & Rothschild, 1978). This goes against the condition of free choice. Involvement in this case is imposed by external forces in the environment rather than being the result of an innate interest in the object. Due to the lack of profound interest in the object, the temporary involvement dissipates once the specific situation ceases to exist. Additionally, this short-lived involvement is likely to be irrelevant to the consumer's sense of who they are. Because of these four characteristics, situational involvement, as conveyed by its own label, is regarded as situational in nature.

Nevertheless, rather than focusing on the situational involvement of the WOM sender, the framework considers the situational involvement of the WOM receiver. This is so because

situational involvement, by definition, arises when the consumer recognises a need to make a purchase decision (Assael et al., 2007). In such a situation, involvement could lead the consumer to explicitly seek information and advice from another consumer. The consumer from whom the advice was sought becomes the WOM sender if they provide the needed advice, and the consumer who originally sought the advice becomes the WOM receiver. In this sense, the situational involvement of the WOM receiver can be thought of as an antecedent of the dissemination of **solicited** WOM which is one of the WOM categories proposed in the framework. However, rather than including the situational involvement of the WOM receiver as a separate concept to predict WOM dissemination, it is subsumed in a new concept labelled difficulty of evaluation. Other aspects that make up this concept are perceived risk, product intangibility, and explicit seeking of advice. The prediction of solicited WOM will be elaborated upon further in Section 3.4.

### **3.2.2.2 Customer satisfaction**

As presented in Section 2.2, customer satisfaction has been viewed as a response to an evaluation process (Oliver, 1980). This process involves comparison between pre-consumption expectations and the actual consumption experience. However, the various meanings and conceptualisations that have been assigned to the nature of this response make it difficult to determine whether satisfaction is dispositional or situational. An argument can be made for the situational nature of the satisfaction response which is predicated on who contributes to the initiation and formulation of this response. The consumer carries out the primary role in determining the satisfaction response by comparing pre-consumption expectations to actual product performance. Nevertheless, the actual performance of the product is outside the control of the consumer. This means that parties other than the consumer have the ability to influence the satisfaction response. Consequently, the satisfaction response is not an action that is freely chosen by the consumer especially in situations where the product is not purchased frequently by the consumer (Fournier & Mick, 1999; Oliver, 1989). Based on this view, customer satisfaction can be regarded as a situational construct.

However, a counter-argument for the dispositional nature of the satisfaction response can be made by focusing on the satisfaction-as-love concept. As argued by Fournier and Mick (1999), satisfaction-as-love is the emotional relationship that the consumer develops with

the product. Consumers exhibiting this type of satisfaction tend to have passion toward and obsessive attachment to the product; they tend to have a desire to always take good care of the product; and they also tend to use the product as a tool to convey their self-identity to others (Fournier & Mick, 1999). Seen from this perspective, customer satisfaction can be regarded as a dispositional construct especially when the product is purchased on a frequent basis and the performance of the product is consistent.

While the satisfaction response can be described as both situational and dispositional, the evaluative process that precedes that response is more clear-cut. Comparing pre-consumption expectations to the actual consumption experience is a purely mechanical exercise that is arguably devoid of dispositional sentiments. This comparison depends on inputs from both the consumer and the product performance. Hence, the free choice condition is not met. In addition, the consumer might view the outcome of that comparison process favourably or unfavourably. However, such a view does not extend to the mechanical aspects of the comparison process except probably in cases where the comparison process is carried out as part of the consumer's formal job such as in the case of professional food critics (Sheraton, 2006) or wine sommeliers (Punnaitinont, Jaroenwanit, & Ruangwanit, 2017). In addition, the process of comparing expectations to actual performance is unlikely to require a protracted period of time; and it is unlikely to be part of the self-identity of regular consumers. Based on the characteristics mentioned above, the evaluative process that precedes the satisfaction response is considered situational in nature. Therefore, instead of including the satisfaction response as a predictor construct, the framework utilises the evaluative process as a WOM predictor. This utilisation would arguably protect the prediction of WOM dissemination from the inconsistencies rife in previous conceptualisations of customer satisfaction which were discussed in Section 2.2.

### **3.2.2.3 Wanting to help**

In Section 2.3, the construct of wanting to help was defined as the consumer's willingness to voluntarily fulfil the need of another consumer for advice and information. Additionally, two conditions were presented as necessary in order for this willingness to arise. First, the prospective helper has to recognise the need of another consumer for help (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Second, there has to be a knowledge discrepancy between the prospective helper and the person in need where the former has the advantage (Price et al., 1995). The

situational nature of the wanting-to-help construct is apparent from the two aforementioned conditions. The instigation of the willingness to help depends on inputs from two parties: the person in need and the prospective helper. Furthermore, the prospective helper might be propelled to help in order to avoid the potential inconvenient consequences of not helping such as social censure (Batson, 1991) or feelings of distress (Dovidio, 1984).

All these factors mentioned above indicate that willingness to help can be invoked by forces in the environment that are outside the control of the prospective helper. This undercuts the condition of free choice. Additionally, the consumer's willingness to help another consumer by providing information and advice is by definition a short-lived event. In other words, the **particular** instance of providing the needed help to a **particular** consumer is unlikely to be a regular activity that reflects the helper's self-identity and personal growth. Accordingly, wanting to help is included in the framework as a WOM predictor.

#### **3.2.2.4 Self-enhancement**

It was stated in Section 2.4 that the tendency to self-enhance is a dispositional characteristic that is common among people and is likely to drive people's behaviour in different situations. Indeed, the dispositional nature of self-enhancement is evident in a number of biases that people tend to have, such as the above-average bias (Packard, 2012). The above-average bias is people's tendency to view their dispositional qualities and abilities as better than others (Alicke et al., 1995). The pervasiveness of human tendencies such as the one mentioned above stems from their association with some indispensable human conditions in terms of physical and psychological well-being (Mezulis et al., 2004). This association explains people's constant need to self-enhance. Accordingly, the need for self-enhancement is a constant need that is not instigated by external forces. Additionally, the fulfilment of this need is inherently volitional. Furthermore, it is a need that is related to people's ego and how they prefer to be perceived by others (Wojnicki & Godes, 2008). Because of these characteristics, the construct of self-enhancement is utilised in the framework as a conditioning construct.

### **3.2.2.5 Interpersonal relationships**

In Section 2.5, people's need for belonging was characterised as a fundamental and universal human need. Bonding and being intimate with others is a need the fulfilment of which has positive consequences psychologically, physically, and in relation to one's lifestyle (Aizer et al., 2013; Rothberg & Jones, 1987). Also, an interpersonal relationship is an important means that people naturally resort to in order to survive in life (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In contrast, negligence of this need can result in adverse consequences to one's well-being. These characteristics imply that people have an innate disposition to build interpersonal relationships with others. Furthermore, the norms that shape interpersonal relationships are starkly different from those governing formal relationships (Assael et al., 2007). The former is based on a long-term commitment between the relationship members that transcends the quality and quantity of any benefits exchanged between the members (Clark et al., 1998). In the latter type of relationships however, the quality and quantity of the exchanged benefits are likely to be outlined with a high degree of specificity and be scrutinised closely (Agarwal, 2014). This further reinforces the dispositional nature of interpersonal relationships; such relationships are cultivated of people's own volition and are not imposed by external or situational factors.

In addition, interpersonal relationships are by definition personally preferable, and are meant to be stable for an extended period of time if not permanently. This is reflected in the two precepts of interpersonal relationships (i.e., frequent contact and positive feelings between the relationship members)(Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It is also reflected in the different types of investment people voluntarily make in order to sustain their interpersonal relationships for as long as the bonding and intimacy continue to exist (Stets & Burke, 2000). Moreover, being capable of maintaining an interpersonal relationship is an integral part of people's self-concept (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Founded on the characteristics discussed above, people's quest for interpersonal relationships is considered dispositional in nature. Accordingly, interpersonal relationships are expected to play a conditioning role in the proposed theoretical framework.

Nevertheless, under the rubric of interpersonal relationships, the theoretical framework incorporates another type of interpersonal relationships that has not been given much attention in the literature of WOM dissemination. To distinguish this from the traditional

interpersonal relationships described above, this new type is labelled consumption-focused interpersonal relationships. It is defined here as a sense of affiliation or bond between two individuals that is based primarily on their consumption homophily of a specific product or brand. At the end of Section 2.5, the principle of homophily was introduced. This principle, which is also known as the like-me principle (Brown & Reingen, 1987), attributes the development of a strong interpersonal relationship between two individuals to the homophily between them on demographic variables such as age, social status, education, sex, and marital status (Granovetter, 1973; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). The more similar two individuals are on those variables, the more likely it is that a strong interpersonal relationship could develop between the two.

Nevertheless, different authors have envisaged different types of interpersonal relationships where members of the relationship share a sense of bonding whilst being dissimilar on demographic variables and similar on non-demographic attributes. Perhaps one of the most relevant concepts in this context is the idea of neo-tribalism first introduced by Maffesoli (1996), and subsequently developed further by Cova (1997) who utilised the concept in the field of consumer behaviour. The neo-tribalism perspective posits that the era of modernity that engulfed the western world in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries changed the traditional meaning of sociality (Ostberg, 2007). Before the advent of modernity, interpersonal relationships tended to spring from within small communities that were based on geographic boundaries or ethnicity (Nancarrow & Nancarrow, 2007). With modernity however, the familial community was largely overshadowed by the concept of the individualistic society (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Within this transformation, unmarked commodities were replaced with branded goods; personal selling lost ground to mass advertising; and fulfilling the needs and desires of the individual gained cultural primacy whereas the collective and traditional customs of the community receded to a secondary place (Cova, 1997; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The actions of individuals were motivated mainly by a quest to be different more than by a desire to conform to traditions. Furthermore, the technological advancements in the second half of the Twentieth century contributed significantly to this individualistic trend (Cova, 1997; Cova & Cova, 2002). Thanks to these advances, marketing messages started to be communicated to consumers in different formats and on a mass scale that transcended the geographic boundaries of small communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Additionally, individual

consumers gained the ability to purchase goods and services from the comfort of their homes without much direct interaction with others (Cova & Cova, 2002).

However, Maffesoli (1996) argued that this sociological change prompted individuals in modern and post-modern societies to search for a new and different type of interpersonal relationships; a type that satisfies their inherent need for belonging, but is more in tune with their individualistic worldview. He labelled this new type of sociality neo-tribes.

Interpersonal relationships of this form are not based on traditional parameters such as kin, ethnicity, or geography. Rather, they are based on non-demographic factors such as a shared lifestyle (Ostberg, 2007) or a shared consumption practice (Cova, 1997). In the context of consumption, Cova and Cova (2001) described goods and services as the linking element that establishes and reinforces the bonds between individuals. However, the strength and depth of bonding in these neo-relationships remain at a moderate level; and therefore, they tend to be ephemeral in nature (Cova, 1997; Nancarrow & Nancarrow, 2007). The momentary bonding exhibited in these neo-relationships does not result in a strong sense of commitment nor reciprocity between members of the relationship (Cova, 1997; Cova & Cova, 2002).

Aside from the moderate level of bonding that is characteristic of neo-relationships, a number of authors have emphasised another exchange process involved in such relationships that is more cognitive in nature. It is called cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), and in the consumer behaviour field, it is specifically called consumption cultural capital (Holt, 1998). Within the field of consumer behaviour, cultural capital refers to “a set of socially rare and distinctive tastes, skills, knowledge, and practices” that are common only among consumers of a particular product (Holt, 1998, p. 3). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) referred to a concept they called legitimacy by which consumers would identify with other consumers based primarily on their shared attitude toward a particular product or brand. A relationship of this kind facilitates the exchange between consumers of knowledge, tastes, and consumption practices pertaining to a particular product.

For example, neo-relationships that revolve around automobile brands such as Saab or Bronco were reported to have facilitated information sharing of about technical matters, suppliers of parts, and recommended dealers (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Similarly, supporters of a particular sports team exemplify a neo-tribe in which short-lived interpersonal



relationships can develop (Nancarrow & Nancarrow, 2007). These supporters might be dissimilar in terms of their demographic attributes. However, for the duration of the game, a sense of bonding and belonging develops between those supporters which stems from their homophilous activity of supporting one team. Along with bonding, the common interest in supporting the team represents a link via which opinions and perspectives about the team are exchanged and reinforced. Another famous example was presented by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) in their analysis of Harley-Davidson motorcycle owners in the 1990s.

Similar to the idea of neo-tribalism, other forms of interpersonal relationships that are consumption or domain specific have been advanced in the literature. The concept of community of limited liability is one example. This concept refers to urban neighbourhoods where members of the community have a common interest in the provision of some basic services in the community such as policing and education (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Nevertheless, bonds and commitment between members of the community tend to be loose (Suttles, 1972). Another example is the concept of virtual community. A virtual community is a network of people formed online who share ideas, knowledge, and enthusiasm about a specific topic, a specific product, or a specific consumer need (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007; Ridings, Gefen, & Arinze, 2002). Members of virtual communities who form interpersonal relationships online are characterised as heterogeneous on demographic attributes but homogeneous on attitudinal attributes (Hiltz & Wellman, 1997; Ridings et al., 2002).

Similar to traditional interpersonal relationships, consumption-focused interpersonal relationships are also dispositional in nature because they originate from people's inherent need for bonding and belonging. Accordingly, they play a conditioning role in the framework. Nevertheless, as can be concluded from the paragraphs above, specific differences between the two forms of interpersonal relationships can be summarily restated. First, while both involve feelings of affection between individuals, the strength and potency of such feelings tend to be higher in the traditional form of interpersonal relationships. Second, while traditional interpersonal relationships involve frequent interactions between the relationship partners, interactions in consumption-focused relationships tend to be occasional and temporary. Third, while commitment is a vital part of traditional interpersonal relationships, such a sentiment is not as vital in consumption-focused relationships.

Therefore, based on the two types of interpersonal relationships delineated above, two categories of interpersonal relationships are envisaged. These two are traditional interpersonal relationships and consumption-focused interpersonal relationships. The first refers to interpersonal relationships in which consumption homophily is low or non-existent. The second refers to interpersonal relationships that are based primarily on consumption homophily. Both have conditioning and moderating roles within the proposed theoretical framework

### **3.2.2.6 Product innovativeness**

In Section 2.6, a distinction was drawn between the innovativeness of consumers and innovativeness of products. While the former is dispositional in nature, consumers' judgement of the latter is situational. As explained in Section 1.3.1.3, consumers who are categorised as innovators tend to be among the first to adopt a new product; they are less conforming to the norms of social groups compared to other types of consumers; and they tend to have influence over other consumers in terms of consumption choices (Nancarrow & Nancarrow, 2007; Weimann et al., 2007).

The innovativeness of products on the other hand concerns the newness of the product irrespective of the personality traits of the consumer. Product innovativeness is basically a cognitive judgement that is predicated on the incongruity between two types of inputs: information about the new product and the consumer's current knowledge (Mandler, 1982). While the second input is controlled and determined by the consumer, the first is controlled and determined by the producer of the new product. Thus, while judging the innovativeness of a new product is a reaction that is produced by the consumer, the producer of the new product has the ability to influence that reaction by exceeding the consumer's current level of knowledge. Additionally, judging the innovativeness of a product is unlikely to require a protracted amount of time, and it is unlikely to be part of the self-identity of ordinary consumers. Due to these characteristics, product innovativeness is deemed a situational construct.

As indicated in Section 2.6, different aspects of the product can be construed as being innovative. For example, an innovation that is related to the core functions of the product constitutes a good or a service innovation (Vogt, 2013). The newness of the product can also be manifested in the marketing promotional message that informs the consumer about the

product(Vogt, 2013). These two areas of innovation have been particularly highlighted in the literature as being relevant to consumers' WOM dissemination. Innovations that pertain to the core functions of products are the primary focus of the diffusion of innovations literature(Vogt, 2013), whereas the innovativeness of promotional messages constitutes a primary theme in the viral marketing literature(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). Both areas of innovation are deemed situational in nature in the current research; and therefore, they are both employed in the framework as WOM predictors.

### **3.2.2.7 Consumption types**

As explained in Section 2.10, most products are not considered inherently hedonic or utilitarian in and of themselves. Rather, the hedonic and utilitarian labels are subjective judgements that consumers make depending on consumers' own perceptions of products (Okada, 2005). This is reflected in the majority of studies that investigated hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption; the unit of analysis in these is often the individual consumer and his or her subjective perception as opposed to the product or the brand (Alsulaiman et al., 2015; Chaudhuri, 2006). For instance, one consumer might view toothpaste as primarily utilitarian due to the product's effectiveness in maintaining oral hygiene. Conversely, another consumer might view the same product as primarily hedonic due to the pleasure that the consumer gains from the taste of the product (Batra & Ahtola, 1991). In like manner, an outfit of clothes might be regarded as mostly utilitarian by one consumer due to the product's effectiveness in providing warmth. Inversely, the same outfit might be thought of as mostly hedonic by another consumer because the product looks cool (Alsulaiman, 2013).

Regarding a brand or a product as hedonic or utilitarian has been presented in research as two dimensions that make up consumers' attitudes toward brands and toward consumption behaviours in general (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Crowley, Spangenberg, & Hughes, 1992). Chaudhuri (2006) divides consumers' attitude toward products and brands into two types: utilitarian and affective. The author defines utilitarian attitude as "a basic level of interest in a brand that is based on a rational predisposition for simple liking or acceptability of the brand" (p. 47). On the other hand, the author defines affective attitude as "a level of interest in a brand that is based on an emotional predisposition, positive or negative, towards the brand" (p. 47).

Defining hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption as expressions of attitudes portrays them as dispositional in nature. An attitude is by definition a disposition that stems from within the individual (Ajzen, 1989). Hence, categorising a product as hedonic or utilitarian is more dependent on the consumer's own proclivities and less susceptible to external forces in the environment. Additionally, an attitude is by definition a tendency toward which the individual has a particular orientation. This is evident in the two definitions quoted above from Chaudhuri (2006). Furthermore, an attitude is thought to be reflected in the individual's lifestyle and personality; and therefore, a utilitarian or hedonic attitude toward a product is expected to be relatively stable over time in terms of its rational or emotional nature. Based on these characteristics, consumption types are considered dispositional in nature, and thus, they play a conditioning role in the framework.

There seems to be a consensus in the literature that hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption do not stand at the ends of a continuum (Chaudhuri, 2006; Chen & Dholakia, 2014; Sindhav & Adidam, 2012). Expressed differently, products can have varying degrees of these two consumption elements at the same time (Okada, 2005). From this point of view, at least three product classifications can be distinguished: products that are primarily hedonic, products that are primarily utilitarian, and products that are both hedonic and utilitarian. Previous studies such as Chaudhuri (2002) and Okada (2005) have tended to focus on the first two classifications (i.e., primarily hedonic and primarily utilitarian). It is acknowledged here that focusing on the two extreme possibilities has merits in terms of comparing and contrasting hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption. Nevertheless, studying the difference between all three classifications identified above might provide a more thorough understanding of the effect of different consumption types on the behaviour of generating WOM.

Fiore and Kim (2007) pointed to the intertwined nature of the hedonic and utilitarian aspects that are associated with shopping experiences. Babin and Babin (2001) found a positive association between hedonic and utilitarian aspects of store patronage. Alsulaiman (2013) asked a sample of two hundred and ninety-four consumers to remember a product they consumed in the past; and then to rate the product on two seven-point scales that measured the product's hedonic and utilitarian aspects. The average hedonic and utilitarian scores were 5.28 and 5.70 respectively. The average difference between hedonic and utilitarian scores was 1.21; and the standard deviation of the difference between hedonic

and utilitarian scores was 1.21. These figures indicate that the majority of the products analysed in that study belonged to the third classification; i.e. they were both hedonic and utilitarian at the same time.

Therefore, the effect of consumption on WOM dissemination is explored via three conditioning constructs: hedonic consumption, utilitarian consumption, and utilitarian consumption. The first refers to products whose hedonic elements are dominant while their utilitarian elements are very minimal or non-existent. The second refers to products whose utilitarian elements are dominant while their hedonic elements are very minimum or non-existent. The third refers to products whose hedonic and utilitarian elements are both high.

### 3.2.3 The theoretical framework

Based on the arguments made in Section 3.2.2, Table 3.1 below summarily segregates the constructs included in the framework into two columns; the first contains constructs that are included as WOM predictors, and the second contains constructs that are treated as either conditioning or moderating constructs.

*Table 3.1 Included constructs and their roles*

Predictors	Conditioning or moderating Constructs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• innovativeness of products</li> <li>• innovativeness of advertisements</li> <li>• exceeding expectations</li> <li>• wanting to help</li> <li>• difficulty of evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consumer involvement</li> <li>• self-enhancement</li> <li>• traditional interpersonal relationships</li> <li>• consumption-focused interpersonal relationships</li> <li>• hedonic consumption</li> <li>• utilitarian consumption</li> <li>• utilitarian consumption</li> </ul>

One of the main arguments made in the current research is the need for a refinement of the construct of positive WOM dissemination. Three WOM categories are suggested here: dissemination of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM, dissemination of unsolicited post-

consumption WOM, and dissemination of solicited WOM. These three categories represent the outcome constructs in the theoretical framework. As indicated by Table 3.1, five constructs are identified as direct predictors of WOM dissemination. These are innovativeness of product, innovativeness of advertisement, exceeding expectations, wanting to help, and difficulty of evaluation. Following the reconceptualization of WOM dissemination into three distinct categories, it is argued here that these WOM categories differ in terms of the constructs that predict them. The theoretical framework is depicted in Figure 3.1. Unsolicited pre-consumption WOM is predicted by two constructs: innovativeness of products and innovativeness of advertisement. Unsolicited post-consumption WOM is predicted by two constructs: exceeding expectations and wanting to help. Solicited WOM is predicted by a single construct: difficulty of evaluation.

In the framework, an un-shaded arrow denotes a direct prediction, a dotted arrow denotes a conditioning effect, and a shaded arrow denotes a moderating effect. A total of seventeen relationships and/or effects are proposed. Depicting each of these seventeen with a single arrow could convolute the framework and make it seem slightly complex. In the interest of making the framework easier to look at and understand, a single arrow depicts the effects of each set of predictors instead of two. For instance, instead of drawing two arrows, one stemming from exceeding expectations and one from wanting to help, and pointing to unsolicited post-consumption WOM, these two effects are represented by one arrow. This is also the case with the two predictors of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM.

Similarly, a single arrow represents the effects of different conditioning constructs that fall under the same rubric instead of one arrow for each. For example, rather than having an arrow for each of the conditioning effects of the three consumption types, one arrow is depicted. This also the case with the conditioning effects of traditional interpersonal relationships and consumption-focused interpersonal relationships. Likewise, a single arrow depicts the two moderating effects that stem respectively from the two types of interpersonal relationships instead of two. While this way of drawing the framework departs slightly from the conventional way in which theoretical frameworks and models are depicted, it has the advantages of clarity and simplicity as only twelve arrows were needed to represent the seventeen proposed effects instead of twenty-nine.

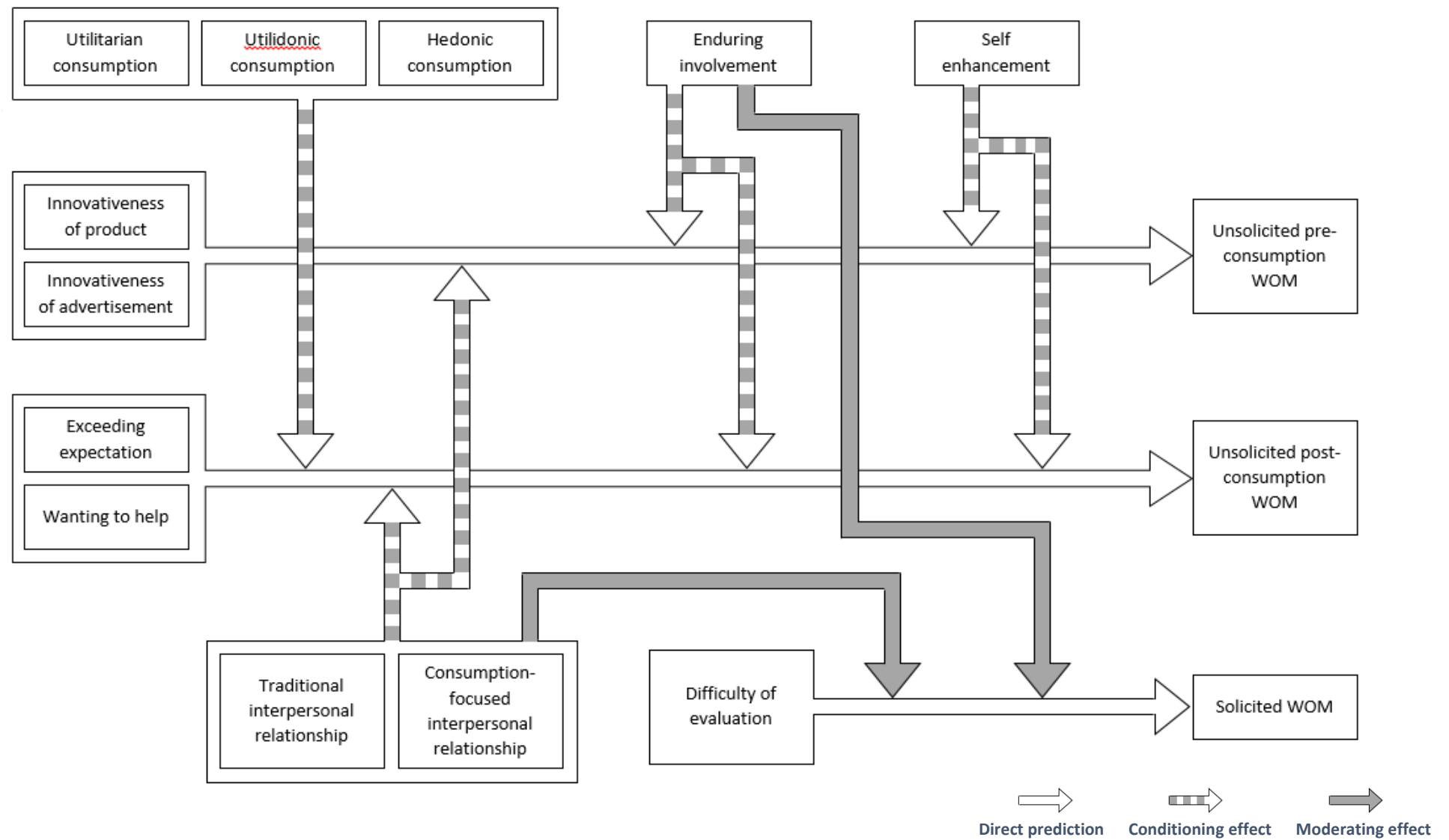


Figure 3.1 Theoretical framework

### **3.3 Unsolicited WOM**

For the first and second WOM categories (i.e., unsolicited pre-consumption WOM and unsolicited post-consumption WOM), theoretical arguments are presented to explain the expected effect of each set of predictors on the outcome (i.e., the respective WOM category). Further, for these two WOM categories, conditioning constructs are presented that are hypothesised to have an impact on the predictive power of one predictor relative to the other predictor. In other words, one of the two predictors is expected to be the stronger predictor of the outcome WOM category when the conditioning construct is accounted for.

#### **3.3.1 Predictors of unsolicited WOM**

Most of the constructs that are used in the current research to explain consumers' unsolicited WOM are not new. As reviewed in Chapter Two, the association between these constructs and consumers' tendency to generate WOM is empirically evidenced throughout the WOM literature. Nevertheless, the current research makes the new argument that these constructs do not all predict the same unsolicited WOM outcome. In particular, innovativeness of product and innovativeness of advertisement are argued to be predictors of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM; they are unlikely to predict unsolicited post-consumption WOM. By the same token, exceeding expectations and wanting to help are argued to be predictors of unsolicited post-consumption WOM; they are unlikely to predict unsolicited pre-consumption WOM.

This argument above is predicated on the integrated information-response model of Smith and Swinyard (1982, 1983, 1988). This model focuses on consumers' cognitive, affective, and conative reactions to information they receive about products, and more specifically on the sequence of those reactions (Smith & Swinyard, 1988). The cognitive reaction refers to consumers' understanding of the information; the affective reaction refers to consumers' feelings about the information; and the conative reaction refers to consumers' actions (Clow & Baack, 2010). Within the integrated information-response model and in studies on consumer attitude in general, consumers' conative reaction usually denotes their intentional and actual behaviour of purchasing or consuming the product (Clow & Baack, 2010; Smith & Swinyard, 1982). The primary argument advanced by the model is that consumers' beliefs that are based on their own consumption experiences are held more strongly than beliefs



that are based on external sources; and therefore, the effect of the former driving purchase decisions is expected to overshadow that of the latter.

The model by Smith and Swinyard (1982) posits that the information which consumers receive about a product often aim to make an association between the product and some particular features or qualities. For example, a promotional message that portrays a newly released book as a compelling read is a piece of information that attempts to establish an association between a product and a particular consumption quality. Furthermore, deriving its main theoretical premise from an earlier theory proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), the model argues that consumers form beliefs upon the reception of product-related information. The strength of these beliefs hinges on the degree to which consumers subjectively accept the association between the product and the specific features or qualities. Consumers form what is called higher-order beliefs when this subjective judgement of association is high, and lower-order beliefs when this subjective judgement of association is low (Smith & Swinyard, 1982). Additionally, this judgement can be influenced by a number of factors that pertain to the amount and consistency of information and to the credibility of the information source (Smith & Swinyard, 1982, 1988). Of these factors, the credibility of the information source is the most focused on within the integrated information-response model. The higher the credibility of the source, the more likely it is that the consumer will accept the association between a product and a particular attribute.

More specifically, the model focuses on two sources of information. The first is the consumer following a trial or a consumption of the product; and the second is a marketer-controlled source such as advertising. In the case of the first source, an association between a product and a particular feature or quality is established in the consumer's mind through direct observation and experience with the product. For example, after a dining out, a restaurant customer might form a belief that the restaurant's food is too spicy for them. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) labelled this belief as descriptive; and represented it schematically as: (O) is (X), where (O) denotes an object such as a product (e.g., restaurant food) and (X) denotes an attribute (e.g., spicy). In the case of the second information source however, the consumer becomes aware of a possible association between a product and a particular attribute through a claim that is made by someone else. For example, the association between the restaurant and spicy food could be based on a dining experience of another customer. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) described this awareness as informational

belief; and represented it schematically as: (S) said (O is X), where (S) denotes an external source.

Due to this difference between a direct experience of the product and advertising, Smith and Swinyard (1982) argued that while direct experience of the product is conducive to the formation of higher-order beliefs about the product, advertising is only capable of generating lower-order beliefs. The authors based their argument on the credibility of the two information sources. In advertising, the source of the information is the marketer who is an external source that has a personal stake in selling the product. Research has demonstrated that the consumer is likely to be sceptic about the information claimed in the advertisement, and to think of the source as biased due to the external characteristic of the advertiser and their vested interest in selling the product (Smith & Swinyard, 1982). In other words, the degree to which the consumer accepts the association between the advertised product and a particular feature or quality is likely to be low and uncertain. Scepticism and uncertainty can be reflected by the consumer casting doubt on the veridicality or accuracy of the claim.

Nevertheless, while uncertainty is one consequence of lower-order beliefs, such beliefs could also result in awareness and curiosity. Awareness in this context refers to the consumer identifying the advertised product as a member of a product category that is relevant to them; whereas curiosity refers to the consumer's desire to obtain more information about the product so that their lower-order beliefs might be elevated to higher-order beliefs (Smith & Swinyard, 1988). The model posits that the levels of awareness and curiosity stimulated by the ad motivate the consumer to reduce the uncertainty by obtaining further information through product trials or consumption without necessarily developing a strong affective reaction toward the product (Smith & Swinyard, 1982). Hence, the sequence of the consumer's reactions to an advertisement is likely to be (cognitive → conative → affective) especially for products that are low cost and low risk (Smith & Swinyard, 1982, 1988). In this situation, purchasing the product is described by Smith and Swinyard (1982) as trial purchase through which unmediated information can be obtained.

In a direct experience of the product however, the source of the information is the consumer themselves. When the consumer discerns an association between a product and a particular feature or quality through direct observation, they are likely to accept this

association with a high degree of certainty because it was realised through the consumer's own senses (Smith & Swinyard, 1982). This constitutes a higher-order belief. Consequently, the high degree of certainty about the product having a particular quality could likely result in a strong affective reaction toward the product and an intention to purchase the product. Hence, the sequence of the consumer's reactions to a direct product experience is likely to be (cognitive → affective → conative) (Smith & Swinyard, 1982, 1988). Purchasing in this situation is considered a commitment purchase because it is based on strong affect (Smith & Swinyard, 1982).

Smith and Swinyard (1983) presented empirical evidence of the arguments posited in their model. In a one-way analysis of variance, the authors divided a sample of consumers into two groups. One group was asked to view a print advertisement about a salted snack food item that had not been introduced to the market yet; whereas the other group was given a sample of the product and asked to try it. Subsequently, participants were asked a number of questions about the certainty of their beliefs in regard to the saltiness of the product; and they were also asked about their likelihood of purchasing the product. In accordance with the model's aforementioned arguments, the authors expected the beliefs of those in the product trial group to be more firmly held than those in the advertisement group. Additionally, the authors expected the beliefs of those in the product trial group to have a stronger relationship with purchase intentions in comparison with those in the advertisement group. Both expectations were empirically supported.

Moreover, the integrated information-response model was extended by Marks and Kamins (1988) by focusing on the interaction between higher-order beliefs and lower-order beliefs. More specifically, the authors studied two scenarios of sequence. In the first, the consumer viewed an advertisement first and subsequently tried the advertised product. In the second, the consumer tried the product first and was subsequently exposed to an advertisement about the sampled product. The authors hypothesised that in the first scenario, the lower-order beliefs formed after viewing the advertisement is susceptible to change following a direct experience of the product which is associated with higher-order beliefs. Inversely, the higher-order beliefs formed after product sampling are less susceptible to and more resistant to change following an ad exposure because advertisements are likely to create lower-order beliefs.

To test these hypotheses, the authors asked a sample of consumers to participate in the evaluation of a new product (a pen), and also in the evaluation of a print advertisement about the product. The sample was divided into two groups. The first received the ad-sampling sequence whereas the second received the sampling-ad sequence. Subsequent to both ad exposure and product sampling, consumers were asked about their beliefs regarding five attributes; consistency of ink flow, comfort of holding the pen, quality of construction, styling, and overall writing performance. Results confirmed the stated hypotheses. Consumers' beliefs about products were more resistant to change when product sampling preceded advertisement exposure, and less resistant when advertisement exposure preceded product sampling.

As noted earlier, the integrated information-response model views the consumer's conative reaction to product-related information as the intentional or the actual behaviour of purchasing or consuming the product. Further, this behavioural reaction can be based on a higher-order affect (i.e., commitment purchasing) or on a lower-order affect (i.e., trial purchasing)(Smith & Swinyard, 1982). In the current research, disseminating positive WOM messages is viewed as another conative reaction to product-related information. This conative reaction is referred to here as (conative-W), whereas consumers' decision to purchase or consume the product is referred to as (conative-P).

Similar to the conative-P reaction, two types of conative-W reaction are conceived. The first is based on lower-order beliefs because it is derived from an external source, whereas the second is based on higher-order beliefs because it is derived from the consumer's own consumption experience. While both contain an element of praise of the product, the two types are likely to differ in the strength of praise. In the first, praise is likely to be confined to aspects of the product that triggered the consumer's interest and curiosity. Simultaneously, such cautious praise initiates a conversation via which the sender can gain more information that reduces their uncertainty about associating a particular attribute with the product (Moore, 2009; Rime, 2009; Tamir & Mitchell, 2012). Accordingly, the first type of the conative-W reaction can be described as sense-making WOM dissemination. This terminology reflects the consumer's ultimate goal from generating praising WOM messages, which is to gain more information and reduce uncertainty. Dissemination of positive sense-making WOM should not be confused with the behaviour of requesting WOM. Requesting WOM occurs when a consumer explicitly asks for consumption-related information, opinion,

or advice. In contrast, disseminating positive sense-making WOM is an action through which the WOM sender expresses their interest in the product; and by doing so implicitly stimulates others to express their opinions about the product (Berger, 2014).

In the second type of the conative-W reaction, the sender of WOM messages attributes their praise of the product to higher-order beliefs about the product. The sender in this case is likely to have a high degree of certainty about the association between the product and a particular quality of interest to them. Thus, the sender is unlikely to need further information from external sources. The sender's first-hand experience with the product is likely to affect other consumers' attitude toward the product. Hence, this type of the conative-W reaction can be described as sense-giving WOM dissemination. Sense-giving has been defined in the psychology literature as "the activity of influencing audiences in the direction of a preferred definition of reality" (Smerek, 2009, p. 7). In other words, people engage in sense-giving activities when they attempt to create meaning for someone else (Weick, 2005).

It is argued here that unsolicited pre-consumption WOM is sense-making WOM, and that unsolicited post-consumption WOM is sense-giving WOM. Pre-consumption information about products is by definition indicative of lower-order beliefs because they are derived from external sources. This argument is in accord with the integrated information-response model, particularly when the source of the information is the marketer (Smith & Swinyard, 1982). Even when the external source is trusted by the consumer such as a close friend, credibility is unlikely to be as strong as the consumer's own experience with the product (Sundaram et al., 1998; Westbrook, 1987). This was reflected in results reported by De Angelis et al. (2012) who found that sixty-five percent of their sample generated WOM messages about their own consumption experiences, whereas only thirty-five percent generated WOM messages about consumption experiences that were encountered by someone else.

The difference between unsolicited pre-consumption positive WOM and unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM in terms of their respective association with lower-order and higher-order beliefs should entail different sets of predictors for each WOM category. Predictors of unsolicited pre-consumption positive WOM should be based on or indicative of lower-order beliefs, and predictors of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM should be

based on or indicative of higher-order beliefs. Two types of innovativeness are presented here as predictors of unsolicited pre-consumption positive WOM: innovativeness of product and innovativeness of advertisement. Both of these predictors are argued to be inherently indicative of lower-order beliefs. Innovativeness of product is viewed here as the newness and novelty of the product at any of the three levels identified by Kotler and Armstrong (2006).

Kotler and Armstrong (2006) viewed a product as a bundle of benefits that the consumer receives during and after they buy the product. Further, these benefits belong to three different concentric levels. At the centre of these is what the authors called the core benefit. This level refers to the basic rudimentary benefit that the consumer receives from the product. Without the provision of the core benefit, the exchange transaction cannot be made. For example, the core benefit that the consumer gains from fitness equipment is the ability to exercise. The next level is called the actual product. This level includes aspects such as features of the equipment, design, branding, and quality. Encompassing the core and actual levels of the product is what Kotler and Armstrong (2006) called the augmented product. This level includes the provision of benefits such as a warranty, delivery and installation, and after-sale service. While it is most often difficult for companies that are considered direct competitors to differentiate the product at the core level, product differentiation is likely to occur at the actual and augmented levels (Kotler & Armstrong, 2006; Levitt, 1986).

The perceived novelty of the product at any of the levels cited above constitutes, as argued in the current research, an instance of product innovativeness. Such a perception of novelty has to be inherently indicative of lower-order beliefs because it is developed prior to a direct experience with the product (i.e., consumption), and because it is based on external sources. Once the product is experienced first-hand by the consumer, the novelty perception is expected to dissipate and the lower-order beliefs about the product are expected to be replaced with higher-order beliefs (Smith & Swinyard, 1982).

Innovativeness of advertisement, in the current research, refers to the novelty of the entertainment component of an advertisement. Two types of advertisements have been identified in the literature: functional and emotional (Lee & O'Connor, 2003). In functional advertising, the message of the ad describes in detail the attributes of the product, and it

attempts to convey a logical argument in order to influence the consumer's attitude toward the product. In emotional advertising, the message of the ad aims to appeal primarily to the consumer's emotions with less focus on the specific attributes of the advertised product (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). These two types of advertisements have been given different labels by different authors. Gopinath, Thomas, and Krishnamurthi (2014) call the two respectively product attribute-oriented advertising and emotion-oriented advertising. Yoon et al. (1999) described the two as claim and non-claim advertising. An entertaining advertisement is considered one form of the latter type of advertisements (i.e., emotional advertisements) (Smith & Yang, 2004; Yaakop & Hemsley-Brown, 2013).

Entertainment in advertisements can be expressed through the use of humour (Hsieh, Hsieh, & Tang, 2012), sexual appeals (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011), catchphrases (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007), playful ad-lines, slogans (Dichter, 1966), and music (Yoon et al., 1999). As noted earlier, information about product attributes aims to establish an association between the product and a particular quality. Entertaining advertisements, on the other hand, aim to provoke the consumer's interest through affect and entertainment (Heath, Bell, & Sternberg, 2001). By definition, entertaining advertisements tend to contain elements of surprise and novelty that trigger the consumer's interest. Simultaneously, the meanings and ideas contained in entertaining advertisements tend to have some degree of obliqueness and ambiguity (Smith, Chen, & Yang, 2008). Both the ambiguity found in entertaining ads and the consumer's interest in these types of ads combine in driving the consumer's desire to comprehend and make sense of the message (Smith & Yang, 2004). Concurring with this view, Sayre and King (2010) refer to receivers of entertaining messages as "active makers of meaning" (p. 49).

Nevertheless, different receivers of entertaining messages are likely to have different and idiosyncratic interpretations of the entertaining aspects of the message (Flamson & Barrett, 2008). Consumers can reduce the ambiguity and obliqueness of the entertaining ad either by talking positively about it (Mazzarol et al., 2007) or by forwarding it to other consumers (Heath et al., 2001). When consumers talk positively about an entertaining advertisement or forward the advertisement to other consumers, this could initiate a conversation through which the consumer can ascertain how other consumers interpreted the ad without explicitly asking for their opinion (Mazzarol et al., 2007). Similarly, when consumers forward or talk positively about an entertaining advertisement, they can discern the degree of

similarity between their affective response to the ad and that of other consumers (Flamson & Barrett, 2008). If the consumer finds that their affective response to the ad is shared by many other consumers, this confers some degree of validation to their own interpretation of the ad's entertaining aspects (Guadagno, Rempala, Murphy, & Okdie, 2013; Heath et al., 2001).

Two scenarios can be envisaged in terms of the consumer's exposure to an entertaining advertisement. The consumer may encounter the ad either before or after consuming the advertised product. If the ad exposure occurs after consuming the product, then in accordance with the integrated information-response model, the consumer's attitude toward the ad and toward the advertised product should be driven primarily by the consumption experience, not by the entertaining message of the ad. If the consumption experience is deemed satisfactory by the consumer, then post-consumption ad exposure could reinforce the consumer's favourable attitude toward the product. In contrast, if the consumption experience is deemed unsatisfactory, then the post-consumption exposure to the entertaining ad is unlikely to influence the consumer's unfavourable attitude toward the product.

Contrary to the scenario described above, if the ad exposure occurs before consuming or trialling the product, then the beliefs that the consumer forms following the ad exposure should be of the lower-order type. Based on this reasoning therefore, innovativeness of advertisement is argued here to be necessarily a predictor of unsolicited pre-consumption positive WOM; it is unlikely to have an effect on unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM. Moreover, the consumer's decoding of the advertisement's entertaining message is likely to depend on the social validation that the advertisement garners across the consumer's social environment. This is also indicative of the lower-order nature of the consumer's beliefs that form after an exposure to an entertaining advertisement.

As for predicting unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM, two constructs are posited as predictors: wanting to help and exceeding expectations. Wanting to help is viewed here as the consumer's willingness to voluntarily fulfil the need of another consumer for advice and information. As explained in Section 2.3, the willingness to voluntarily help others has to be preceded by two conditions. The first is the helper's recognition of the need of someone else



(Batson & Shaw, 1991); the second is the helper's confidence in their own competence to provide help (Price et al., 1995).

In the context of WOM, help from consumer to consumer materialises in the provision of WOM messages. That is the provision of information about products, brands, and consumption choices. It is argued here that the voluntary provision of such information is naturally based on higher-order beliefs; otherwise, help is unlikely to be offered voluntarily. More specifically, the prospective helper is likely to provide voluntary consumption advice only if that advice is based on a previous consumption experience they personally had. If advice is based on second-hand information, help is unlikely to be volunteered. This argument is predicated on the social risks associated with the provision of advice in general and WOM messages in particular (Gatignon & Robertson, 1986). Such risks stem from the probability that the proffered advice might be deemed inappropriate by the recipient of the advice. Consequently, this could lead to unfavourable results in terms of fulfilling the consumption needs of the advice recipient; and it could also prompt the recipient to attribute this unfavourable result to the advice giver (Gatignon & Robertson, 1986; Mazzarol et al., 2007). Mazzarol et al. (2007) found in their qualitative research that consumers were reluctant to voluntarily give consumption-related advice in particular situations. Accordingly, the construct of wanting to help is utilised as a predictor of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM not as a predictor of unsolicited pre-consumption positive WOM.

Expectations in the current research refer to the expectations that the consumer has prior to a consumption experience. Exceeding expectations as a construct captures the extent by which the actual consumption of the product exceeds what the consumer expected prior to consumption. This construct is by nature a product of higher-order beliefs because it can be determined only after the consumer engages in a direct consumption experience. As explained in Section 2.2, exceeding pre-consumption expectations (i.e., positive disconfirmation) is one of three conditions propounded in the disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1977, 1980); the other two conditions are merely meeting expectations and falling short of meeting expectations. Since the current research focuses only on positive WOM, negative disconfirmation is not utilised here. Thus, the predictor is labelled exceeding expectations.

The direct effect of disconfirmed expectations on the tendency to generate WOM messages has seldom been investigated in the literature. Rather, disconfirmed expectations feature most often in the prediction of customer satisfaction which is often suggested as a WOM predictor. One of the few studies that touched on the direct effect of disconfirmed expectations was that by Derbaix and Vanhamme (2003). The authors asked consumers to remember two consumption experiences they had in the past; one that they thought was positively surprising, and one that they found not surprising. Details about each experience were collected and consumers' actual WOM was measured. The results revealed that surprising experiences prompted consumers to generate positive WOM messages more often than non-surprising experiences (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003).

Schneider and Bowen (1999) argued that positive disconfirmation of consumers' expectations lead consumers to experience emotions of delight and positive surprise. Similarly, Carver and Scheier (1990) argued that the attainment of goals are likely to result in positive emotions especially if the attainment of goals exceeds expectations. A similar argument was also espoused by Wilson, Gilbert, and Centerbar (2003) and by Gable, Reis, Impett, and Asher (2004). Nevertheless, due to physiological and psychological forces that are inherent in people, positive emotions such as delight and surprise are by nature short-lived (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003; Rime, 2007). Put differently, emotional reactions to positive events are likely to gradually fade away shortly after they are experienced (Wilson et al., 2003). The rapidity of this dissipation depends on how intense the experienced emotions were; more intense emotions command slower dissipation of the emotions and vice versa (Rime, 2009).

Homeostasis is often cited as an explanation of the fleeting nature of positive emotions in general and delight and positive surprise in particular (Rime, 2007; Wilson et al., 2003). Homeostasis refers to any biological, physiological, or psychological system that allows people to be responsive to stimuli that emanate from their environment (e.g., having an emotional reaction to a positive event). At the same time, a homeostatic system keeps people's emotional reactions from deviating too far and for too long from the normal level of equilibrium that was prior to stimuli (Wilson et al., 2003). Wilson et al. (2003) provided three reasons to explain the function of the homeostatic system in terms of regulating people's emotional reactions to positive events. First, if a person's emotional reaction remains at an extreme level for too long, the person might not be able to respond to

subsequent emotional events. Second, an extreme emotional state is likely to hinder the person's ability to think rationally. Third, it could be physically and mentally demanding to be in an extreme emotional state for too long.

It is argued here that in resistance to the natural forces that unconsciously regulate emotions like delight and positive surprise, consumption experiences that exceed expectations unconsciously motivate the consumer to do something in order to keep those fleeting emotions activated. Generating positive WOM messages about an experience that exceeded one's expectations is suggested here as an attempt by the consumer to prevent the dissipation of positive emotions. This argument is based on the idea of savouring proposed by Bryant (1989). Savouring as conceptualised by Bryant (1989) is the deliberate prolongation of enjoyment following a positive event. Langston (1994) developed this idea further and relabelled it capitalisation. Capitalisation refers to "the process of beneficially interpreting positive events" (Langston, 1994, p. 1112). According to Langston (1994), positive events represent opportunities that people can seize and capitalise on. Rime (2007) identified three ways through which capitalisation can take place. The first is to mark the significance of the event through celebration. This further enhances the chances of the event being retained in memory. The second is to tell others about the event, whilst the third is to try to find a self-serving explanation as to why the positive event happened.

Out of the three mechanisms just presented, the second is the most pertinent to the current research. Langston (1994) presented empirical evidence of the positive effect of this capitalisation mechanism on the prolongation of positive emotion beyond the level of emotions elicited by the event itself. The author asked a sample of college students to record at least one positive event that they encountered on a daily basis and for a period of two weeks. After measuring the valence of the event, participants were required to choose from a list of reactions they might have engaged in following each event. The list included a number of capitalisation reactions such as telling others about the event and doing something to mark the occurrence of the event. Additionally, participants' daily level of affect was measured. The results revealed that capitalisation reactions increased the level of positive affect above and beyond the valence of the positive event itself. Furthermore, it was found that telling others about the positive event was the main driver of this effect. Langston's study (1994) was later replicated and its findings confirmed by Gable et al. (2004).

In line with the ideas of savouring and capitalisation, it is argued here that exceeding the consumer's expectations motivates the consumer to generate unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM messages. By engaging in such actions, the consumer's goal is to prolong the emotions of delight and positive surprise that were triggered by the exceeding of their expectations. This goal has been expressed in the literature with different words such as re-living (Rime, 2009), re-experiencing, and rehearsing (Gable et al., 2004). The goal of prolonging or re-living a positive event is particularly pertinent to the positive disconfirmation of expectations. Furthermore, as stated earlier, exceeding expectations is likely to result in the experience of emotions such as delight and positive surprise. Surprise is an emotion that particularly prompts surprised individuals to retain as much information as possible about the surprising event. The increased amount of information retained in memory prepares the individual to talk about the event with others (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003).

Based on the above arguments, the following propositions are suggested:

- Proposition 1:           The dissemination of unsolicited pre-consumption positive WOM can be predicted by innovativeness of products and innovativeness of advertisements collectively.
- Proposition 2:           The dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM can be predicted by exceeding expectations and wanting to help collectively.

### **3.3.2 Conditioning constructs of unsolicited WOM**

Section 3.3.1 outlined two different sets of constructs to respectively predict two different unsolicited WOM outcomes, and each set comprised two predictors. The current section introduces a number of conditioning constructs that are expected to impact those predictions. It is argued here that a conditioning construct will make one predictor more salient than the other predictor in terms of predicting the WOM outcome. As will be explained in the paragraphs below, a typology from the psychology literature is utilised to explain these conditioning mechanisms. It is argued here that the salience of one WOM predictor over the other WOM predictor can be explained by the typological congruence between the predictor and the conditioning construct.

### **3.3.2.1 Rational and experiential systems of thinking**

In the psychology literature, there seems to be a consensus around a two-system typology that explains people's thinking and processing of information. In line with Epstein (1994), these two systems are labelled in the current research the rational and the experiential systems. Different authors diverge on the labels they give to these two systems.

Respectively, the two systems have been labelled the reflective and impulsive systems (Blazevic et al., 2013), thoughts and feelings (Zajonc, 1980), the cognitive and affective systems (Swann et al., 1987), system one and system two (Stanovich & West, 2000), and the associative and rule-based systems (Sloman, 1996). Nevertheless, most available conceptualisations of the two systems broadly converge in terms of the two systems' defining characteristics.

The experiential system is more emotional, whereas the rational system is more logical and less influenced by emotions (Blazevic et al., 2013; Epstein, 1994). In the experiential system thus, people tend to think in a holistic and intuitive manner and based on what is pleasurable or painful. Opposite to this, people in the rational system tend to think in a detailed and analytic way and based on what is sensible (Epstein, 1994). Therefore, the experiential system tends to function very fast and it is likely to be action-orientated; whereas the rational system is rather slow (Blazevic et al., 2013; Swann et al., 1987) and more reflective (Zajonc, 1980). In a study reported in Epstein (1993), participants were presented with descriptions of hypothetical events in which they had to face an unfortunate incident. They were then asked to list the first three things they thought about after those descriptions were communicated. In one of the hypothetical unfortunate events, participants were instructed by a friend to park their car in a particular parking space. Later when they backed out from the parking space, they had an accident. In the participants' first reaction, the majority thought that they would feel angry and that they would place the blame on the friend for choosing that particular parking space. This thought represented an outcome of the experiential system. Upon further reflection however, many participants said that they would accept responsibility for the accident. This was regarded as an outcome of the rational system. Epstein (1993) cited these findings to point to the rapidity of the experiential system and the slowness of the rational system.

Relatedly, the experiential system is said to have a longer evolutionary history than the rational system, on both individual and cultural levels (Epstein, 1994, 2003). Individually, the smiling of an infant at their caregiver is indicative of an emotional mode of information processing that exists in humans long before the nurturing of any cognitive or analytical capabilities (Izard, 1984, 1993; Zajonc, 1980). Culturally, the rational system is viewed as the fruit of the Enlightenment era in the eighteenth century (Foucault, 1984). This makes the rational system a relatively recent development compared to the experiential system. Additionally, the rational system enables people to make logical comparisons between different things on multiple dimensions; whereas in the experiential system, people tend to make a comparison between things based on one general dimension (Kahneman, 2011). Expressed differently, the rational system enables cross-context processing of information, whereas the experiential system is more context specific (Epstein, 1994).

Furthermore, the experiential system is described as effortless while the rational system is described as effortful (Epstein, 1994; Zajonc, 1980). For example, developing a feeling towards or an impression about someone after meeting them, which is a task of the experiential system, requires less effort than remembering the colour of that person's hair (Zajonc, 1980). By contrast, chess players are reported to be susceptible to weight loss when they compete in chess tournaments (Zajonc, 1980). This is suggestive of the analytical effort that is exerted when engaging in this activity.

Moreover, the experiential affective reasoning is more discretionary than the rational analytical reasoning. Otherwise stated, the experiential system is more subjective whereas the rational system is more objective and rule-governed (Epstein, 1994; Kahneman, 2003). This makes the latter easier to control and change than the former (Kahneman, 2003; Zajonc, 1980). People can be easily seized and controlled by their emotions, whereas in the rational system, people are in control of their analytic thoughts. This further means that the rational system enables people to dissect both the outcome of their analytical reasoning and the process or computation via which that outcome was reached. Contrary to this however, people in the experiential system are consciously aware of only the outcome of their experiential thinking (Sloman, 1996).

The two modes of thinking described above are assumed in principle to be operating jointly (Denes-Raj & Epstein, 1994); in the words of Zajonc (1980), "feeling is not free of thoughts,

nor is thought free of feelings (p. 154). Nevertheless, it is also assumed that one of the modes tends to overshadow the other in particular conditions (Denes-Raj & Epstein, 1994; Epstein, 1994). To substantiate the latter assumption, a number of tests have been carried out and reported in the literature. One very famous test that signifies the ability of the experiential system to over-rule the rational system is known as the Linda problem. Tversky and Kahneman (1983) provided the following description of a hypothetical person named Linda to a sample of students:

Linda is 31 years old, single, outspoken and very bright. She majored in philosophy. As a student, she was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice, and also participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations. (p. 297)

Subsequently, the students were presented with the following statements about Linda:

- 1) Linda is active in the feminist movement.
- 2) Linda is a bank teller.
- 3) Linda is a bank teller and is active in the feminist movement. (p.297)

In light of the description of Linda provided earlier, students were required to rank these statements in terms of probability. The sample of students who participated in this exercise consisted of three groups based on their knowledge of statistics and probability. The first group comprised undergraduate students who did not possess knowledge about statistics or probability. The second group comprised first-year graduates who possessed some basic knowledge about statistics and probability. The third group comprised doctoral students who undertook advanced statistics and probability courses. An overwhelming majority across all three groups ranked the third statement ahead of the second. That was eighty-nine percent of the first group, ninety percent of the second group, and eighty-five percent of the third group (Tversky & Kahneman, 1983). The statistical knowledge that the second and the third groups possessed would have presumably enabled them to use the rational system when tackling this exercise. However, the results showed that they tended to employ the more convenient and intuitive experiential system.

From a probabilistic point of view, ranking the third statement before the second is an error because a conjunction of two events cannot be more probable than one of the events that

make up that conjunction (Epstein, 2003; Sloman, 1996). This is known as the conjunction error. Donovan and Epstein (1997) replicated the Linda problem with the addition of an explicit instruction to participants that they should approach the problem as a statistical problem. As reported by the authors, this explicit instruction partially reduced the percentage of the conjunction error compared to what was reported in the earlier study of Tversky and Kahneman (1983). Nevertheless, more participants still made the same error by ranking the third statement ahead of the second.

Another test that confirms the prevalence of the experiential system is known as the bat and ball puzzle. The puzzle is as follows: “a bat and ball cost \$1.10. The bat costs one dollar more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?” (Kahneman, 2011, p. 44). According to Kahneman (2011), this riddle was presented to university students from Princeton, MIT, and Harvard, more than half of which gave the intuitive but wrong answer of ten cents. The percentage of students from other universities who gave the same wrong answer was over eighty percent. If the ball costs ten cents, and the total cost of both the bat and the ball is one dollar more than the ten cents, then this increases the total cost to one dollar and twenty cents. Thus, the correct answer is that the ball costs five cents.

Furthermore, the prevalence of the experiential system over the rational system was deduced from what has become known as the ratio-bias phenomenon. Kirkpatrick and Epstein (1992) presented participants with two bowls that were filled with jelly beans. One bowl was small in size and it contained ten jelly beans. Of these ten, nine were coloured white and one was coloured red. The other bowl was of a bigger size and it contained a hundred jelly beans. Of these one hundred, ninety were coloured white and ten were red-coloured. Participants were told that they would earn two dollars for every time they manage to blindly draw a red jelly bean (Epstein, 1994). Despite the fact that each of the two bowls had the same ten percent probability of drawing a red jelly bean, the majority of participants chose to draw from the bigger bowl (Kirkpatrick & Epstein, 1992).

Opposite to the above-mentioned findings that corroborate the prevalence of the experiential system, counter findings have also been reported that emphasise the potency of the rational system to over-rule the experiential system. Frederick (2005) combined the bat and ball puzzle to other two similar questions into what he called the cognitive reflection test. Alter, Oppenheimer, Epley, and Eyre (2007) later used this three-question test to



demonstrate the prevalence of the rational system over the experiential system in specific conditions. The authors presented the cognitive reflection test to a sample of university students. Half the sample were provided a version of the test in which the questions were printed in an easy-to-read twelve-point black font. The other version of the same test that was presented to the other half of the sample was printed in a difficult-to-read ten-point font that was italicised and pale in colour. The experimenters argued that when the processing of information is easy, the experiential system would be activated. In opposition, the difficulty with which information is perceived would be a cue that the experiential system is not adequate and that there is a need for the rational system to process the information. This prediction was confirmed with ninety percent of those who answered the easy-to-read version providing at least one wrong answer, and only thirty-five percent of those who received the difficult-to-read version providing a wrong answer.

The jelly beans exercise was also indicative of the prevalence of the rational system under certain circumstances. Denes-Raj and Epstein (1994) replicated this exercise while varying the probability of drawing a winning jelly bean from the large bowl and keeping the ten-percent probability of the small bowl constant. In all drawing trials, the small bowl always contained one red jelly bean and nine white jelly beans. This offered a ten-percent probability. For the large bowl however, the number of red jelly beans across trials varied between nine and five. These varying numbers correspondingly offered probabilities between nine percent and five percent, all of which are lower than the ten-percent probability of the small bowl. The results of this study largely confirmed the earlier findings in which the majority of participants opted to draw from the less probable bowl; which meant that the experiential system was dominating the rational system. This was the case when the probability of drawing a red jelly bean from the larger bowl was nine, eight, seven, or six percent. However, when the probability was five percent, the overwhelming majority opted to draw from the small bowl; which meant that the dominance of the experiential system over the rational system shifts at a certain point where the latter would over-rule the former (Denes-Raj & Epstein, 1994).

Denes-Raj and Epstein (1994) invoked the findings cited above to substantiate the two assumptions mentioned earlier of the two systems of thinking; 1) that the experiential and rational systems are presumed in principle to be operating in a joint fashion; and 2) that in some circumstances, one system could prevail over the other. To explain this further,

Kahneman (2011) offered the following personal experience. During a comfortable stroll, one can simultaneously think of mundane things. However, when the need arises to engage in a more sophisticated mental activity such as multiplying two-digit numbers or putting together a complicated argument, one is more likely to stop walking. By the same token, as the speed of the walking accelerates, one's ability to think of anything other than the pace of that activity diminishes (Kahneman, 2011).

In the current research, the typology of the experiential and rational systems is applied to the predictors of the two outcomes of unsolicited WOM, and to the constructs that condition these predictions. Alternatively stated, some of the predictors and some of the conditioning constructs will be regarded as more conducive of the activation of the experiential system; and others will be regarded as more conducive of the activation of the rational system. This relative polarisation will create a typological congruence between some predictors and some conditioning constructs. It will be argued here that when a conditioning construct is typologically more congruent with a WOM predictor, that predictor will predict more of the WOM outcome compared to another predictor that is incongruent or less congruent with the condition. In addition to this reasoning, further specific arguments and available findings from the WOM literature will be cited to back up the argument of typological congruence between two constructs.

Using the typological congruence in order to argue for the salience of one relationship over another has a precedence in the literature. In a study that focused on the relationship between attitude and behaviour, Millar and Tesser (1986) viewed attitude as a general evaluation that consists of two components: cognitive and affective. Further, they opined that behaviour can be viewed along the same lines. Hence, they argued that some behaviours are cognitively driven and others are affectively driven. That is, some behaviours may be predicted by constructs that are cognitive in nature and others may be predicted by constructs that are affective in nature. The authors hypothesised that a typological match between an attitude component and the driver of a behaviour should make the correlation between the general attitude and the outcome behaviour stronger than if there was a typological mismatch.

To test this hypothesis, Millar and Tesser (1986) ran an experiment in which participants were presented a computer screen with five puzzles and asked to choose to solve any of

them. Participants were told that the puzzles were designed specifically to increase people's analytic skills. The driver of the outcome behaviour was manipulated by two conditions. In the first condition, some participants were told that, following those puzzles, they will be asked to undergo a test that assesses their analytical skills. In the second condition, other participants were told that following the puzzles, they will be asked to undergo a test that measures their social sensitivity. The first condition represented a cognitive predictor because participants in this condition are likely to view the puzzles as an opportunity to improve their analytical ability before the test. In other words, the puzzles are likely to be viewed as a means (i.e., to practice) to an end (i.e., the subsequent analytical test). Conversely, the second condition represented an affective predictor because participants in this condition are likely to view the puzzles as a leisure activity before the next phase of the experiment (i.e., the social sensitivity test)(Millar & Tesser, 1986).

After this manipulation, participants were individually given five minutes to attempt the puzzles. At the end of that phase, attitude toward the puzzles was manipulated into two conditions. In the first condition, participants were required to focus on and analyse **why** they felt the way they did about the puzzles. This condition captured the cognitive component of the participants' attitude. In the second condition, participants were required to focus on and analyse **how** they felt about the puzzles. This condition represented the participants' affective component of the attitude. Next, participants' general attitude toward the puzzles was measured by a seven-point like-dislike scale(Millar & Tesser, 1986).

Before administering the final tests (i.e., the analytical ability and social sensitivity tests), each participant was informed that there will be a delay of about ten minutes before the final test can be administered. The pretext given to participants to justify the delay was that the experiment administrator had to go introduce the five puzzles to another participant. During this delay, the waiting participant was offered a free-play period in which they were allowed to attempt any of the five puzzles again if they wish to do so. Every time the participant selected a puzzle in the free-play period, the computer automatically recorded the time for which the puzzles were attempted. This measure of time represented the outcome construct in the study(Millar & Tesser, 1986).

The correlation between participants' general attitude toward the puzzles and the amount of time they spent viewing the puzzles during the free-play period was analysed across the

conditions. For participants who were primed to view the puzzles as a means to an end (i.e., the cognitive driver), the correlation was higher when participants focused on the cognitive components of their attitude than when they focused on the affective components. On the contrary, for participants who were primed to view the puzzles as a leisure activity (i.e., the affective driver), the correlation was higher when participants focused on the affective component of their attitude than when focused on the cognitive component (Millar & Tesser, 1986).

The argument of typological congruence described above has been explained in terms of the mental resources required by each of the experiential and rational systems. When the effortless and fast experiential system is the primary mode of thinking in a particular circumstance, thoughts that emanate from the effortful and slow rational system tend to be neutralised (Kahneman, 2003; Sloman, 1996). Likewise, when the effortful and slow rational system is the primary mode of thinking in a particular circumstance, thoughts originating from the effortless and fast experiential system tend to be suppressed or rejected (Evans, 2003; Kahneman, 2011). It is argued here that the typological congruence between a predictor and a conditioning construct contributes to the primacy of either system.

The differences between the experiential and rational systems that were highlighted earlier can be used as criteria, based on which a particular construct is regarded as more evocative of either the experiential or the rational system. In addition to these differences, the criterion utilised by Millar and Tesser (1986) to make this distinction is borrowed here. Millar and Tesser (1986) distinguished between instrumental and consumatory motives of behaviour. They argued that the former is associated with cognition (i.e., the rational system); whereas the latter is associated with affect (i.e., the experiential system). Consumatory behaviour is rewarding in and of itself whereas instrumental behaviour lacks this intrinsic value (Pham, 1998). Solving a puzzle for pleasure (Millar & Tesser, 1986) or reading a novel for entertainment (Pham, 1998) are examples of consumatory behaviour. Solving a puzzle in order to improve one's analytic skills (Millar & Tesser, 1986) or studying an academic textbook to prepare for an exam are examples of instrumental behaviour.

As demonstrated in the aforementioned experiment of Millar and Tesser (1986), people who engage in instrumental behaviour are likely to be able to specify and articulate the reasons behind their behaviour. In contrast, people who engage in consumatory behaviour are likely

to lack this level of specificity; they are instead more likely to be guided by the feelings that are associated with the behaviour. Relatedly, people engaging in instrumental behaviour are likely to focus on goals of which they are consciously aware (Blazevic et al., 2013). Such goals are known in the literature as conscious goals (Kruglanski et al., 2002). By contrast, people engaging in consumatory behaviour are likely to be guided by goals of which they are not consciously aware (Blazevic et al., 2013). Such goals are known in the literature as unconscious or background goals (Kruglanski et al., 2002).

Attesting to the existence of unconscious goals, and therefore to the distinction between conscious and unconscious goals, an experiment that was conducted by Chun, Kruglanski, Sleeth-Keppler, and Friedman (2011) is cited. Two events were used in this experiment in order to manipulate a sample of university students into two conditions; one is positive and the other is negative. The positive event was the qualification of the university's basketball team to the semi-final stage in a national basketball tournament. The negative event was a rash of vandalism that broke after the university's team lost the semi-final. The first condition was an event of which the students would be proud; and hence it would prompt them to want to identify with the university and its winning team. The second condition on the other hand, was an event of which the students would likely be ashamed; and thus, it would prompt them to want to disidentify with the university and its student body. Two separate questionnaires were presented to both groups of students in which the students' feelings about either event was probed (Chun et al., 2011).

Subsequently, all students were asked to examine two small pieces of fabric and then choose the more durable of the two. Nevertheless, what was not communicated to the students was the fact that both swatches were made of the same material. The only difference between the two batches of fabric was their colour. One had the same colour of the university to which the students belonged (i.e., red), whereas the other had a different colour (i.e., purple). In the results, those in the positive event condition thought of the red fabric as more durable. Conversely, those in the negative event condition thought the purple-coloured fabric was more durable (Chun et al., 2011). The experimenters interpreted these findings as an indication of the existence of unconscious goals. They saw the tendency of the proud students to associate durability with the red-coloured fabric as a means to attain the unconscious goal of wanting to identify with their university. On the contrary, the

tendency of the ashamed students to associate durability with the purple fabric was seen as a means to attain the unconscious goal of wanting to disidentify with the university.

The next subsections classify each of the concepts that predict or condition the two outcomes of unsolicited WOM as either analytical or experiential. Such classifications will be based on the instrumental-consumatory distinction and on the differences between the two systems of thinking that were outlined earlier. In line with these classifications, arguments will be presented in regard to which predictor will be a stronger predictor of the WOM outcome and under which condition.

### **3.3.2.2 Rationality and experientiality of constructs**

In Section 3.3.1, the dissemination of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM was hypothesised to be predicted by two constructs: innovativeness of advertisements and innovativeness of products. It is argued here that innovative (i.e., entertaining) advertisements are more likely to be processed by the experiential system; and that information about innovative products are more likely to be processed by the rational system.

As cited earlier, entertaining advertisements appeal to the receiver's emotions through music, playful catchphrases or humour. The entertaining material is not necessarily part of the advertised product (Cheung & Thadani, 2012); however, it is provided for the ad viewer to consume. The consumption of the entertaining material is supposed to have a positive impact on the affective component of the viewer's attitude toward the product (Smith & Swinyard, 1982). Therefore, viewing an entertaining advertisement is likely to be rewarding in and of itself; and thus, it can be characterised primarily as emotional and consumatory in nature. In line with this characterisation, the viewer of an entertaining advertisement is consciously aware of the emotional state that ensued after viewing the ad, but they may be bereft of a cogent explanation as to how that emotional state developed. Furthermore, entertaining advertisements are by nature susceptible to idiosyncratic and subjective interpretations by different viewers (Flamson & Barrett, 2008). This stands as a further indication that the assessment of the innovativeness of an entertaining advertisement is a function of the experiential system.

On the other hand, information that pertains to an innovative product is likely to revolve around the fundamental functions of the product (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011) and its specific

attributes (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Accordingly, such factual information is more likely to be processed in a logical and mechanical manner in order to facilitate the consumer's understanding of the new product (Vogt, 2013). This type of information processing is more compatible with the rational and objective mode of thinking. Thus, processing information about an innovative product can be characterised primarily as analytical and instrumental in nature. In accordance with this view, when an understanding of a new product begins to formulate, consumers become cognisant of how the information was processed and of the outcome of that processing.

As for the second outcome of unsolicited WOM (i.e., dissemination of post-consumption WOM), two predictors were proposed: exceeding expectations and wanting to help. It is argued here that exceeding expectations is more evocative of the experiential system; and that wanting to help is more evocative of the rational system. Exceeding expectations is more experiential in nature because the unexpected attainment of one's goals is associated with emotions such as delight and positive surprise (Schneider & Bowen, 1999). Accordingly, surprised consumers are likely to be conscious of the affective state they are experiencing, but are not necessarily able to cogently explain how that affective state developed.

Relatedly, the behavioural response of a surprised consumer is likely to be guided by goals of which they are not consciously aware (Bryant, 1989). These are characteristics that are more compatible with the experiential and consumatory mode of thinking. Additionally, surprise and delight are emotions that are quick to fade away after being experienced (Wilson et al., 2003). This rapidity of dissipation is more in line with the fast processing of information that characterises the experiential system.

Wanting to help, in contrast, is argued here to be more rational in nature due to the analytical prerequisites that precede the consumer's willingness to voluntarily provide help and advice. The first of these prerequisites is the discernment by one consumer of the need of another consumer for consumption-related information or advice (Batson & Shaw, 1991). This discernment is not prompted by an explicit request from the person in need. Rather, it is established by way of observation (Chou & Stauffer, 2016; Mazzarol et al., 2007). This includes observation of the facial and indirect verbal expressions of the person in need and their use of a particular product (Chou & Stauffer, 2016; Hoffman, 1984). Such acts of observation are more aligned with the rational system of thinking which pays attention to details (Epstein, 2014).

The second prerequisite is having the competence to provide the needed advice (Price et al., 1995). Such competence is reflected in the helper's knowledge about available brands and about the optimal ways in which a product can be used or repaired (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Due to the social risks associated with the provision of voluntary advice, a consumer's own assessment of their competence to give advice is argued here to be primarily a cognitive and rational exercise. It is argued to involve a careful assessment of the suitability of one's advice to the need of another consumer. This makes consumers' willingness to voluntarily advise other consumers an analytical and effortful activity; characteristics that are descriptive of the rational system of thinking. Moreover, following the fulfilment of the two prerequisites mentioned above, the consumer's behavioural response is likely to be guided by the conscious and specific cognitive goal of satisfying others' need for information and advice. This conscious awareness of one's goals makes the consumer's willingness to help another consumer more in line with the instrumental and rational system.

In the prediction of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM, five conditioning constructs are investigated. These five are: enduring involvement, self-enhancement, traditional interpersonal relationships, and consumption-focused interpersonal relationships. In the prediction of unsolicited post-consumption WOM, the same four conditioning constructs are investigated in addition to the following three constructs: hedonic consumption, utilitarian consumption, and utilidonic consumption.

The construct of enduring involvement is viewed in the current research as being more on the side of the rational system of thinking. As detailed earlier, enduring involvement is the ongoing interest that a consumer has in a particular product category (Houston & Rothschild, 1978). Because this type of involvement endures over time, it becomes part of the consumer's self-identity (Taylor et al., 2012). As a result, consumers who identify with this type of involvement are engaged in a constant learning about the product category (Richins & Bloch, 1986). On an ongoing basis, they are interested in information related to the product category from various sources such as friends, advertisements, or magazines (Venkatraman, 1990).

Over time, this ongoing interest results in the consumer accumulating knowledge and expertise about the product category (Wojnicki & Godes, 2008). Previous research



demonstrated that such knowledge is likely to be processed and encoded in a cognitive and deliberate manner when consumers are enduringly involved with the product category (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Madden, Allen, & Twible, 1988). Information processing, when enduring involvement is high, is likely to focus on detailed and technical aspects of products' attributes (Baker & Lutz, 1988; Lee & O'Connor, 2003), is likely to follow a logical order (Yoon et al., 1999), is likely to be careful and slow (Madden et al., 1988), and is likely to require time and effort (Cheung & Thadani, 2012).

Based on the attributes mentioned above, enduring involvement seems to be more conducive to the rational and analytical mode of thinking. The classification of enduring involvement as rational and analytical creates a typological congruence between enduring involvement and innovativeness of products which is a predictor of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM. In line with this typological congruence, it can be argued that innovativeness of products would be a more salient predictor of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM than innovativeness of advertisements when enduring involvement is high. To corroborate this argument, empirical evidence can be cited from the literature.

A positive association has been reported by numerous studies such as Venkatraman (1990) and Higie and Feick (1989) between enduring involvement and the construct of opinion leadership. Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger, and Yale (1998) found a strong positive relationship between a consumer's expertise and the likelihood of them being perceived as opinion leaders. This positive association was also detected by Richins and Root-Shaffer (1988), who simultaneously reported no relationship between opinion leadership and another type of involvement (i.e., situational involvement). Similarly, a strong positive association was reported by Price et al. (1995) between enduring involvement and market mavenism. As cited in Section 1.3.1.3, influential consumers such as opinion leaders and mavens are among the first to identify and adopt innovative products (Iyengar et al., 2010).

In addition, previous research has identified enduring involvement as a condition that has an impact on whether information is processed either cognitively and analytically or heuristically and affectively. When enduring involvement is high, cognitive processing of incoming information is likely to take precedence over affective processing of the information (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984). A high level of enduring involvement results in the long-lasting priming of functional and technical information about the product category,

making this information more accessible in the consumer's mind (Baker & Lutz, 1988). Consequently, the consumer who has an ongoing interest in a product category would tend to focus their cognitive attention on this technical information and avoid being distracted by information that is more affective and subjective in nature (Baker & Lutz, 1988; Yoon et al., 1999).

By the same token, the classification of enduring involvement as rational and analytical creates a typological congruence between enduring involvement and wanting to help which is a predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM. In line with this typological congruence, it can be argued that wanting to help would be a more salient predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM than exceeding expectations when enduring involvement is high. This argument finds empirical support in the findings reported by Price et al. (1995). The authors found a strong positive association between consumers' enduring involvement and their tendency to provide consumption-related help to other consumers. The authors' conceptualisation of help covered both the provision of information and advice and the performance of certain consumption tasks. To explain this positive association, the authors contended that enduring involvement equips consumers with the necessary level of expertise and competence that reduces the risks that are often associated with the provision of voluntary advice.

Based on the above reasoning and arguments, the following propositions are suggested:

Proposition 3: In a condition of high enduring involvement, innovativeness of products will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited pre-consumption positive WOM than innovativeness of advertisements.

Proposition 4: In a condition of high enduring involvement, wanting to help will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than exceeding expectations.

As explained at the end of Section 2.4, self enhancement arises when people's self-esteem becomes negative (Swann et al., 1987); and it is also manifested as a constant disposition in order for people to preserve their self-esteem at a stable high level (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009). According to Alicke and Sedikides (2009), these two psychological ends can be

attained via two control mechanisms: primary and secondary control. Primary control is an **objective** and **instrumental** way to self-enhance. For example, a consumer who wants to project an image of themselves as having a high socioeconomic status might fulfil this goal through public consumption of products that are socially perceived as expensive or unique (Lovett et al., 2013). Alternatively, secondary control is a **subjective** way to self-enhance. For example, instead of publicly consuming the same expensive and unique products, the consumer might attempt to self-enhance through exaggeration, or by questioning or reinterpreting the social perception by which the said products are regarded as signals of high status (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009).

Additionally, rationality and therefore primary control mechanisms are likely to be exerted in domains that are inherently more objective, whereas irrationality and therefore secondary control mechanisms are likely to occur in more subjective domains (Tappin & McKay, 2016). For instance, the standard by which the meaning of a superior socioeconomic status is socially constructed is arguably more objective than determining the morality of people's behaviour. Consensus is likely to prevail in the first domain, but the second domain is likely to be riddled with idiosyncrasy and variation from person to person (Tappin & McKay, 2016). Furthermore, it is argued by Alicke and Sedikides (2009) that secondary control mechanisms are utilised when primary control mechanisms are not tenable. Based on how the two control mechanisms are viewed, it can be inferred that primary control mechanisms are compatible with the rational and objective mode of thinking; and that secondary control mechanisms are more compatible with the experiential and affective mode of thinking.

In the context of consumers' dissemination of WOM, a number of ways were outlined in Section 2.4 through which consumers seek to self-enhance. They can generate positive WOM messages about the luxurious or unique products they consume (Berger, 2014; Han et al., 2010); they can signal to others their knowledge and expertise in terms of comparing product attributes and prices (Packard & Wooten, 2013); and they can boost their sense of self by cultivating a reputation of themselves as opinion leaders who have influence over the consumption decisions of others (Gatignon & Robertson, 1986). These ways can be viewed as self-enhancement domains that are more conducive to objectivity and less to subjectivity. The parameters that determine superiority in these domains seem to be primarily consensual, less variable, and less influenced by idiosyncrasy (Tappin & McKay, 2016).

Moreover, striving for an enhanced self-esteem, by definition, entails the analytical tasks of comparing one's self to others and then accordingly exerting the appropriate effort to have a level of self-esteem that is as high as or higher than that of others (Tappin & McKay, 2016). Therefore, due to the above characterisation of self-enhancement as objective, instrumental, and effortful, the construct is classified here as more facilitative of the rational system of thinking. In support of this view, Tappin and McKay (2016) found that people's effort to self-enhance on domains such as knowledgeability and competence were more rational and objective than their self-enhancement effort on the domain of morality. The authors attribute this result to the variability from person to person of what constitutes morality.

The classification of self-enhancement in the current WOM research as more rational and instrumental creates a typological congruence between self-enhancement and product innovativeness which is a predictor of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM. Consistent with this typological congruence, it can be argued that innovativeness of products would be a more salient predictor of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM than innovativeness of advertisements when self-enhancement is high. Innovative products, as cited in Section 2.6, can result in a knowledge gap between the incoming stimulus of the new product and the consumer's existing knowledge (Weick, 1995). This gap seems to be similar to a high self-esteem that is being threatened. If the knowledge gap created by an innovative product prompts interested consumers to talk positively about the product, then such an effect is likely to be amplified when self-enhancement is high.

Additionally, the classification of self-enhancement as more rational and instrumental makes this construct typologically congruent with the construct of wanting to help which is a predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM. Consistent with this typological congruence, it can be argued that wanting to help would be a more salient predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM than exceeding expectations when self-enhancement is high. Evidence from the literature can be cited in support of this argument. In a study that focused on consumers' product reviews online, Racherla and Friske (2012) found that the higher the reputation of the reviewer, the more motivated she or he becomes to post accurate and elaborate reviews. Reputation was measured in the study by the number of the reviewer's friends which is displayed on the reviewer's Yelp.com profile. It can be deduced from this finding that people's striving for reputation, which is akin to the construct of self-

enhancement, amplified the effect of their willingness to help others through the posting of product reviews. Similarly, Wasko and Faraj (2005) investigated the motives behind people's willingness to voluntarily share their knowledge on an electronic network of law professionals. A strong correlation was detected between reviewers' striving for reputation and their willingness to help others in the network through the provision of advice and information.

Helping is argued here to be compatible with self-enhancement because it seems to function as an appropriate justification for people's explicit attempts of self-enhancement. Individuals who forthrightly seek to demonstrate their uniqueness, their knowledge superiority, or their status superiority, risk being subjected to social penalties and disapproval (Nancarrow & Nancarrow, 2007; Tian et al., 2001). Consequently, they are likely to refrain from promoting their superiority publicly. However, if there are valid and logical justifications for self-enhancement activities, self-enhancement attempts would shift from being explicit to being unintended, and individuals would be shielded from potential social risks. Fodder for this argument can be gleaned from some of the findings reported by Lovett et al. (2013). The authors found unique brands to be positively associated with consumers' behaviour of generating WOM messages. Nevertheless, this positive link was detected in online interactions, but not in face-to-face interactions. The authors argue that in the offline sphere, consumers can express their uniqueness more easily through public consumption of the unique product without the need for generating WOM; however, in the online sphere, generating explicit WOM messages about the unique product seems to be the least inconvenient way to express uniqueness. In other words, the communication medium (i.e., the internet in this case) limited the uniqueness seeker from expressing their uniqueness through public consumption; and therefore, it was appropriate for them to express that uniqueness explicitly with less liability to potential social risks.

Based on the above arguments and findings, the following propositions are put forward:

Proposition 5:            In a condition of high self-enhancement, innovativeness of products will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited pre-consumption positive WOM than innovativeness of advertisements.

Proposition 6: In a condition of high self-enhancement, wanting to help will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than exceeding expectations.

Bonding and positive emotional feelings are part and parcel of strong traditional interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This makes being in such relationships a consumatory and rewarding experience in and of itself. Additionally, striving for strong interpersonal relationships in the traditional sense is a fundamental human need that people have pursued throughout history (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This gives further credence to the compatibility between the construct and the experiential mode of thinking that also has a long evolutionary history (Epstein, 2014). Furthermore, due to the significance of these relationships in terms of people's psychological wellbeing, people tend to be committed to maintaining them (Chu & Kim, 2011). Accordingly, people tend to invest their emotions heavily in the maintenance and advancing of these relationships (Stets & Burke, 2000). Such norms emphasise the overall nature of the emotional bond as opposed to a scrupulous evaluation of the costs and benefits exchanged in the relationship (Agarwal, 2014). Adherence to these norms seems to be in line with the experiential and holistic system of thinking more than it is with the rational and analytical system.

Due to all the above-mentioned considerations, the construct of traditional interpersonal relationships is classified here as compatible with the experiential system of thinking. This classification creates a typological congruence between this construct and innovativeness of advertisements which is a predictor of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM. In harmony with this typological congruence, it can be argued that innovativeness of advertisements would be a more salient predictor of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM than innovativeness of products when the condition of traditional interpersonal relationship is high.

According to a phenomenon that is known as the social sharing of emotions, the investigation of which was pioneered by Rime (2009), people are motivated to voluntarily talk about their emotions when such emotions are of high arousal. For instance, the emotions of joy or ecstasy that an individual may feel after viewing an entertaining advertisement would likely prompt the viewer to talk positively about the ad or share it with others. Several authors have contended that talking about one's positive emotions stimulates bonding and strengthens the social tie between the sharer and the receiver

(Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003; Gable et al., 2004; Rime, 2009). Empirical evidence for this view was presented by Peters and Kashima (2007) who found that emotion sharing creates a coalition between the sharer and the receiver. Further evidence can be found in Rime (2009). In a review of previous studies conducted by the authors and his colleagues on the social sharing of emotions, the author reported that the overwhelming majority of sharers consistently chose to disclose their emotions to people with whom they had an intimate relationship. Such sharing however did not extend to non-intimates (Rime, 2009).

Moreover, a link between entertainment and traditional interpersonal relationships has uniquely been noted in the literature. Joking for example, which is one form of entertainment, is unlikely to occur between strangers (Fine & De Soucey, 2005). In order for a joke to be communicated between two individuals, a relationship between the two must exist. This relationship facilitates the communication of the joke because it disengages the joke from what the joker really believes. In other words, the receiver of the joke knows the joker well, and therefore, they have to assume that the jocular remark was said only in jest; thus, due to the close interpersonal relationship, there is no need for the joker to apologise (Fine & De Soucey, 2005). Similar to the communication of jokes, it can be argued that forwarding entertaining advertisements among consumers is likely to rely on a close interpersonal relationship between the forwarder and the receiver.

Additionally, the asserted compatibility between the construct of traditional interpersonal relationships and experiential thinking creates a typological congruence between this construct and exceeding expectations, which is a predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM. In harmony with this typological congruence, it can be argued that exceeding expectations would be a more salient predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM when the condition of traditional interpersonal relationship is high. The phenomenon of the social sharing of emotions can also be cited to support this argument. The high-arousal emotions of delight and positive surprise which are experienced as a result of exceeding the consumer's expectations are likely to trigger the consumer's positive WOM in order to capitalise on and prolong those positive emotions (Langston, 1994). Generating WOM about a positively surprising event is a behaviour that is likely to be directed at people with whom the sender has a close interpersonal relationship in the traditional sense (Rime, 2007). To explain this likelihood, Gable et al. (2004) argued that attaining one's goals beyond expectations represents good news for which one's close other is likely to express their

happiness. The close other's expression of happiness further intensifies the sharer's capitalisation efforts, and it also strengthens the close relationship between the two. The authors presented empirical evidence that confirmed these views.

Nevertheless, the above-mentioned argument for the salience of exceeding expectations seems to be in collision with a counter argument that is fairly acknowledged in the literature. This counter argument contends that people's willingness to help is a function of a strong tie between two individuals (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). In other words, the stronger the interpersonal relationship and bonding between the two, the more likely altruistic behaviours will ensue. This view is not contested in the current research. However, it is argued here that a distinction ought to be made between people's desire to help and people's ability and competence to help. People may recognise that their close other is in need for help, but this recognition and what it entails in terms of being concerned about the wellbeing of the close other does not necessarily mean that people are able to provide the required help. This ties in with the point of view made at the end of Section 2.3, which de-emphasised the factors that drive people's helping behaviour, and focus rather on the helping behaviour itself. It also ties in with the classification of the construct of wanting to help as largely conducive of the rational system of thinking.

Based on the above arguments, the following propositions are offered:

Proposition 7:            In a condition of strong traditional interpersonal relationship, innovativeness of advertisements will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited pre-consumption positive WOM than innovativeness of products.

Proposition 8:            In a condition of strong traditional interpersonal relationship, exceeding expectations will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than wanting to help.

Having considered the construct of consumption-focused interpersonal relationships as one form of the broad phenomenon of interpersonal relationships, it is acknowledged here that this construct is likely to be prone to some processes of the experiential/emotional mode of thinking. Nevertheless, it is also argued here that due to the differences between



consumption-focused interpersonal relationships and traditional interpersonal relationships, the former type is more likely than the latter to be susceptible to the processes of the rational-analytical mode of thinking. While both types of interpersonal relationships involve bonding and positive emotional feelings, the level and intensity of this emotional bonding are considerably disproportionate between the two. Traditional interpersonal relationships are founded on a much stronger and more intense feeling in comparison with consumption-focused interpersonal relationships which are founded on homophily of consumption (Cova, 1997). This disproportionality of bonding explains the discrepancy between the two types of interpersonal relationships in terms of the commitment between the relationship parties and in terms of the longevity of the relationship. Due to these differences, the thinking processes that occur in the consumption-focused type are arguably less emotional and less holistic than those occurring in the traditional type.

Further, consumption homophily between two consumers is likely to trigger the cognitive and effortful task of sharing their cultural capital of consumption with each other. This includes comparing and contrasting information and opinions about their homophilous consumption (Holt, 1998; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Accordingly, such a task is likely to require the utilisation of the rational-analytical mode of thinking. More pertinently, this cognitive exchange process has been viewed in the literature as the activation of weak ties between individuals whose relationship is more domain specific (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Gruen et al., 2006). Based on the above considerations, it is argued here that the employment of the rational system of thinking is likely to occur in consumption-focused interpersonal relationships more so than in traditional interpersonal relationships. This in turn creates a **relative** typological congruence between consumption-focused interpersonal relationships and innovativeness of products which is a predictor of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM. In parallel with this relative typological congruence, it can be argued that innovativeness of products would be a more salient predictor of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM than innovativeness of advertisements when the condition of consumption-focused interpersonal relationship is high.

The exchange between consumers of their cultural capital of consumption has been viewed as an integral part of the diffusion of innovation literature (Gruen et al., 2006). A resemblance can be traced between this exchange process and positive WOM messages that consumers generate when they encounter an innovative product. Both activities involve the

expression of consumers' partiality for a particular product and also the stimulation of a conversation through which the views of other consumers about the product can be obtained.

Viewing consumption-focused interpersonal relationships as relatively more susceptible to the rational mode of thinking also creates a typological congruence between this type of relationships and the construct of wanting to help which is a predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM. Correspondingly, it can be argued that wanting to help would be a more salient predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM than exceeding expectations when the condition of consumption-focused interpersonal relationship is high. Predictive salience here is assigned to the construct of wanting to help because the construct is more likely to satisfy the two conditions necessary for helping behaviours to occur. These two are the recognition of someone else's need for help and having the competence and ability to help (Batson & Shaw, 1991; Price et al., 1995). As a result of two consumers exchanging views and comparing notes about their homophilous consumption, a discrepancy may occur between the two in terms of what they know about the consumption activity they have in common or in terms of how this activity can be pursued in an optimal way. Due to this potential discrepancy, one consumer is likely to recognise that the other consumer is in need for information and advice. Additionally, because this type of interpersonal relationships revolves around one domain that is common to both consumers, one consumer is likely to have the ability to help (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Ridings et al., 2002).

In light of the arguments presented above, the following propositions are advanced:

- Proposition 9: In a condition of high consumption-focused interpersonal relationship, innovativeness of products will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited pre-consumption positive WOM than innovativeness of advertisements.
- Proposition 10: In a condition of high consumption-focused interpersonal relationship, wanting to help will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than exceeding expectations.

Section 2.10 presented a fairly extensive review of the literature on the hedonic type of consumption in contrast with the utilitarian type. Based on that review, the compatibility between hedonic consumption and the experiential mode of thinking and the compatibility between utilitarian consumption and the rational mode of thinking become glaringly self-evident. In hedonic consumption, the consumer receives emotional benefits such as fun and excitement (Chaudhuri, 2002). Such emotions are experienced when people utilise their experiential mode of thinking (Epstein, 2014). Accordingly, the emotional benefits sought by consumers in hedonic consumption are by definition consumatory and are sought for their own sake (Chandon et al., 2000). This corresponds to one of the characteristics of the experiential system of thinking in terms of being rewarding in and of itself (Epstein, 2014).

Further, the hedonic type of consumption is to a large extent personal and subjective (Babin et al., 1994); attributes that also describe the experiential mode of thinking (Epstein, 2014). Furthermore, consumers in hedonic consumption have a tendency to process information at a global and abstract level (Alsulaiman, 2013); a tendency that matches the holistic characteristic of the experiential system of thinking (Epstein, 2014). Matching hedonic consumption to the experiential system of thinking seems to be a point of agreement between different authors. Starting with Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), who were among the harbingers of the concept of hedonic consumption within the field of consumer behaviour, they chose the word “experiential” to describe this type of consumption. Concurring views were also expressed in Pham (1998), Denes-Raj and Epstein (1994), and Fiore and Kim (2007).

Classifying hedonic consumption as experiential results in a typological congruence between hedonic consumption and the construct of exceeding expectations which is a predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM. Taking note of this typological congruence, it can be argued that exceeding expectations would be a more salient predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM than wanting to help when hedonic consumption is high. As described earlier, the exceeding of the consumer’s expectations is likely to evoke emotions of delight and positive surprise (Schneider & Bowen, 1999; Vogt, 2013). These emotions are akin to the feeling of excitement that is experienced in hedonic consumption. Additionally, capitalising on a delightful and surprising consumption experience through generating positive WOM seems analogous to the high-arousal characteristic of hedonic consumption (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Therefore, the evocation of delight and surprise following the exceeding of

consumers' expectations would arguably be more facilitated when the consumption episode is hedonic.

Moreover, hedonic products are a matter of personal tastes. Determining which product is hedonic and which is not is personal and subjective (Alsulaiman, 2013; Okada, 2005). Therefore, giving voluntary advice about a hedonic product is likely to carry a reputation risk (Mazzarol et al., 2007). That is, the personal and subjective nature of hedonic consumption would increase the uncertainty of the advice giver as to whether their hedonic perception of the product will match that of the advice receiver. Thus, this would increase the uncertainty over the suitability of the advice to the receiver's needs. Furthermore, in a hedonic consumption, consumers' need for advice and information is likely to be for promotion goals as opposed to prevention goals (Arnold & Reynolds, 2009). Expressed differently, in this type of consumption, consumers' need for advice might not be urgent or necessary (Alsulaiman, 2013). Consequently, the willingness to volunteer one's advice about a hedonic product might not be strong.

In consideration of the arguments outlined above, the following proposition is offered:

Proposition 11: In a condition of high hedonic consumption, exceeding expectations will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than wanting to help.

Different from hedonic consumption, the benefits that consumers receive in utilitarian consumption are mostly void of emotions. Rather, they are more task-related benefits that revolve around the functionality aspects of the product such as usefulness, practicality, and efficiency (Babin et al., 1994; O'Curry & Strahilevitz, 2001). Therefore, utilitarian consumption has been described in the literature as a means to an end (Chandon et al., 2000), which corresponds to the instrumentality attribute of the rational system of thinking (Epstein, 2014). Also, the way in which utilitarian benefits are perceived and evaluated has been described as analytical and rational (Werth & Foerster, 2007); traits that also define the rational system of thinking (Epstein, 2014). Typically, the characteristics of utilitarian consumption cited above endow this type of consumption with more objectivity in terms of judgement and evaluation (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982); an attribute that is also characteristic of the rational system of thinking. Moreover, consumers in utilitarian

consumption tend to process information in a detailed and analytic manner (Pham & Chang, 2010), which is also analogous to the rational system of thinking (Epstein, 2014).

Classifying utilitarian consumption as rational and analytical creates a typological congruence between this type of consumption and the construct of wanting to help which is a predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM. It can be argued, in line with this typological congruence, that wanting to help would have more salience in terms of predicting unsolicited post-consumption WOM than exceeding expectations when utilitarian consumption is high. This argument can be backed up by one of the findings reported in Yap et al. (2013). The authors investigated the effect of a number of predictors on the cognitive and affective characteristics of WOM messages. One of these predictors was helping other consumers. Cognitive characteristics were operationalised with items such as the specificity, clarity, informativeness, and reliability of the WOM message; whereas the measurement of affective characteristics included items such as the strength of words used in the message, the intensity of the message, and the strength of message delivery. The authors found consumers' willingness to help other consumers with advice had a strong positive effect on the cognitive aspect of the WOM message than on the affective aspects. This result meant that consumers' willingness to volunteer their advice is tied to objective and verifiable facts about the product more than to the sender's personal and subjective taste and sentiments. Advice about a utilitarian product can be backed up with facts and logic; hence, the risk of damaging one's reputation by giving a wrong advice is low. Building on this finding, it can be argued that consumers' willingness to help another consumer is more likely to transpire when the product is perceived as utilitarian.

Further, when consumers' expectations about a utilitarian product are exceeded, they are likely to be in a state of quiescence, relaxation, and reflection (Higgins, 2001; Idson et al., 2000). This is a contrast to the feelings of delight and positive surprise that follow the exceeding of expectations in hedonic consumption. Such a contrast was empirically confirmed by Chitturi et al. (2007) who found that exceeding expectations in hedonic consumption was associated with delight; whereas in utilitarian consumption, exceeding expectations was associated with mere satisfaction. In light of this confirmed contrast, it can be conjectured that consumers' experience of delight and positive surprise after their expectations are exceeded is likely to be attenuated in utilitarian consumption.

Based on the above, the following proposition is submitted:

Proposition 12: In a condition of high utilitarian consumption, wanting to help will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than exceeding expectations.

Utilidonic consumption has been described earlier as comprising high degrees of both hedonic and utilitarian elements at the same time. Because of this straddling of two types of consumption in one instance, classifying utilidonic consumption as conducive of either experiential or rational thinking might seem untenable. Nonetheless, it is opined here that in utilidonic consumption, the experiential mode of thinking is likely to overshadow the rational mode. Three arguments are presented to support this view. First, it has been established that the experiential mode of thinking and hedonic aspects of consumption are holistic and effortless; whereas the rational mode of thinking and utilitarian aspects of consumption are effortful and specific (Alsulaiman, 2013; Epstein, 2014). It is contended here that shifting one's focus from a detailed view to a more holistic view is easier than the other way around. Applying this argument on utilidonic consumption, shifting one's focus from the utilitarian aspects of the product to the hedonic aspects of the product is easier than the other way around. This professed dynamic is based on the evolutionary background of the experiential system which is much older, more natural and more convenient (Epstein, 2014).

Second, the experiential system is associated with emotions, and this makes it more compelling than the dispassionate analytical system. Third, the utilitarian aspects of consumption, which are perceived through the rational system, are likely to make the consumer content and quiescent; whereas the hedonic aspects, which are perceived through the experiential system, are likely to make the consumer excited and poised for immediate action (Epstein, 2014). Consequently, the relaxing effect of the utilitarian aspects of consumption is unlikely to slow down the motivational force that is created by the hedonic aspects. Accordingly, the dominance of the experiential mode of thinking over the rational mode in utilidonic consumption could be interpreted as a sign of a relative compatibility between this hybrid type of consumption and the experiential mode of thinking.

However, this relative compatibility does not seem to be as strong as that between hedonic consumption and the experiential mode because of the high degree of utilitarian value

inherent in this hybrid type of consumption. Therefore, while a relative compatibility is asserted here between utilidonic consumption and the experiential system of thinking, it is also contended that such a compatibility would be attenuated by the utilitarian aspects of the consumption. Based on the assertions made above, an argument can be made for a relative typological congruence between this utilidonic consumption and exceeding expectations which is a predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM. Chitturi et al. (2007) presented empirical evidence which demonstrated that consumers tend to maximise the hedonic benefits they could possibly receive from a product when both the hedonic and utilitarian aspects of the product meet or exceed the consumer's expectations.

In view of the relative typological congruence asserted above, the following proposition is posited:

Proposition 13:            In a condition of high utilidonic consumption, exceeding expectations will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than wanting to help.

### **3.4 Solicited WOM**

To predict the third WOM category (i.e., solicited WOM), a single predictor is posited: difficulty of evaluating the product. This WOM category differs from the other two WOM categories introduced earlier in terms of the purpose they are supposed to fulfil. While WOM messages in the two unsolicited WOM categories are internally motivated, WOM in the solicited WOM category has to be extracted from the sender with an explicit request by another consumer. Absent such a request, WOM is unlikely to be generated. As explained previously, the unsolicited dissemination of positive WOM can be a means to provoke an insightful conversation; it can be a channel via which emotions are shared; it can be utilised as a strategy to prolong the experience of positive emotions; and it can be the result of observing the needs of another consumer.

These mechanisms reiterated above seem to be internally motivated. When such motives are absent, reception of an explicit request for WOM seems to be a logical explanation for why WOM is generated. There is a precedent in the literature where the reception of an explicit request to perform a particular behaviour is viewed as a prerequisite for the occurrence of that behaviour. In a re-conceptualisation of the behaviour of helping, Chou and

Stauffer (2016) distinguish between unsolicited helping and solicited helping between co-workers. While the former type of helping is internally motivated, the latter type has to be preceded by an explicit request from the person who needs help.

The WOM predictors reviewed in Chapter Two and employed in the current theoretical framework can be regarded as internally motivated; thus, they revolve around the WOM sender. Since the consumer's dissemination of solicited WOM pivots on their reception of an explicit request from another consumer, those internally-motivated predictors are rendered irrelevant in terms of predicting solicited WOM. Therefore, in order to predict this WOM category, predictors that revolve around the WOM receiver need to be utilised. Borrowing from the literature of information seeking, a construct labelled difficulty of evaluation is introduced. This construct basically refers to the difficulty of evaluating a product before, during, or after consumption. The higher this difficulty **as perceived by the WOM seeker**, the more likely they will be situationally involved, and the more likely they will explicitly request information and advice from another consumer (Mitra, Reiss, & Capella, 1999). Such a request then will trigger the other consumer (i.e., **in this case the WOM sender**) to generate the needed WOM message.

The theoretical underpinnings of the difficulty of evaluation construct are derived from the continuum of evaluation composed by Zeithaml (1981). This continuum was a further development of three product classifications that were proposed earlier by Nelson (1970) and Darby and Karni (1973). To the left of the continuum of Zeithaml (1981) are products that are easy to evaluate, and to the right of the continuum are products that are difficult to evaluate. Additionally, three categories of products are placed on the continuum. On the leftmost end are products that are high on what is called search attributes. These attributes are aspects of the product that can be judged and evaluated easily before purchasing or consuming the product. Examples of search attributes include size, smell, colour, and price (Pride et al., 2007).

In the middle part of the continuum are products that are high on what is known as experience attributes (Zeithaml, 1981). These attributes are aspects of the product that can be judged and evaluated only after purchasing or consuming the product. Taste of a restaurant meal, the wearability of a garment, and a haircut are examples of this type of attributes (Mitra et al., 1999; Zeithaml, 1981). On the rightmost end of the continuum are



products that are high on what is called credence attributes. These describe aspects of the product which the consumer cannot judge or evaluate even after purchasing or consuming the product. Examples of products that are high on credence attributes include psychotherapy sessions, surgical operations, legal representation, or relining of automobile brakes (Mitra et al., 1999; Pride et al., 2007; Zeithaml, 1981). The consumer's inability to evaluate this type of attributes can be ascribed to their lack of knowledge and skills necessary for the forming of an evaluation (Zeithaml, 1981).

Furthermore, Zeithaml (1981) postulated that, in general, most goods are likely to be placed leftward on the continuum, whereas services tend to cluster rightward. Her argument is based on the differences between goods and services on characteristics such as intangibility, standardisation, and inseparability of production and consumption. Because services cannot be embodied in a physical form, they cannot be examined or evaluated before consumption. Also, the intangibility of services means that they cannot be stored; and as a result, the level at which services are performed is likely to vary according to variations in demand and employees' skills and moods. Additionally, the consumer's participation in the production of services is unavoidable; and this could contribute to further variations in service performance (Zeithaml, 1981).

Mitra et al. (1999) discussed the implications of the three product classifications on the continuum in terms of perceived risk and information seeking. They argued that the amount of product information necessary for evaluating the product increases, and uncertainty decreases, as the product moves leftward on the continuum. Along with these dynamics, the consumer's perceived risk decreases. In contrast, as the product moves rightward on the continuum, information decreases, and consequent to that, uncertainty and perceived risk rises. In addition, Mitra et al. (1999) echoed others such as Fang et al. (2011) and Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003) in arguing for a positive association between consumers' perceived risk and their behaviour of seeking information from personal sources.

Expressed differently, the easier product evaluation is, the lower the consumer's perceived risk is, the lower their level of situational involvement, and the less likely they would explicitly request WOM messages from other consumers. Alternatively, the more difficult product evaluation is, the higher the consumer's perceived risk, the higher their level of situational involvement, and the more likely they would explicitly request WOM from others.

While the positive association between perceived risk and information seeking (i.e., WOM request) has been empirically evidenced in the literature, the theoretical framework of the current research proposes a direct link between difficulty of evaluation, which subsumes the constructs of risk and situational involvement, and the behaviour of explicitly seeking solicited WOM. To that end, the following proposition is suggested:

Proposition 14:           Difficulty of evaluation will be positively related to the dissemination of solicited positive WOM.

In addition, for the sake of gaining more insight into the positive relationship proposed above, the moderating effects of three constructs are also postulated. The first two moderating constructs are traditional interpersonal relationships and consumption-focused interpersonal relationships. The literature on the behaviour of help seeking points to social and psychological costs that people accrue when they explicitly ask others for help. Requesting help from others could be interpreted as an acknowledgement by the help seeker of their incompetence, inferiority, dependence, deficiency, or inadequacy (Bamberger, 2009; Chou & Stauffer, 2016). As a consequence, the acknowledgement of these personal limitations could result in negative feelings, embarrassment, and a damaged self-esteem.

It is argued here that requesting help from a close other, in the form of a WOM message, is unlikely to expose the help seeker to the costs mentioned above. As explained in Section 2.5, traditional interpersonal relationships subsume a strong sense of bonding and a relational self-concept that is shared by both members of the relationship (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). These aspects of traditional interpersonal relationships would arguably shield the WOM seeker from the negative consequences of seeking help. Oppositely, requesting WOM from a person with whom one has a consumption-focused interpersonal relationship is more likely to expose the seeker to those negative consequences.

As explained previously, bonding in a consumption-focused interpersonal relationship is based primarily on the consumption homophily between the relationship members (Cova, 1997). The explicit seeking of WOM within this type of relationships seems to be antithetical to this presumed homophily. Such a request could lead the potential helper to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the consumption homophily between themselves and the WOM seeker.

Therefore, for the sake of preserving the legitimacy of their homophily with others, the person in need for advice and information is likely to refrain from explicitly requesting WOM. Additionally, the intensity of this domain-specific bonding is not as strong as that of the traditional type of interpersonal relationships (Cova, 1997). With a sense of bonding that is mild in intensity and is domain-specific, WOM seekers would arguably be more reluctant to expose their personal limitations, lest they become vulnerable to the negative consequences of that disclosure. Therefore, in line with the above reasoning, the following propositions are put forward:

Proposition 15:       The proposed positive relationship between difficulty of evaluation and the dissemination of solicited positive WOM will be positively moderated by traditional interpersonal relationships.

Proposition 16:       The proposed positive relationship between difficulty of evaluation and the dissemination of solicited positive WOM will be negatively moderated by consumption-focused interpersonal relationships.

The third construct that is expected to moderate the proposed positive association between difficulty of evaluation and the generation of solicited WOM is the enduring involvement of the WOM sender. As cited earlier in Section 2.1, consumers who have a long-term interest in a particular brand tend to be more knowledgeable of that brand than other consumers (Venkatraman, 1990). Knowledge superiority enables these enduringly involved consumers to gain a higher social status and influence over other consumers. Because of their higher status, their advice and their WOM tend to be solicited explicitly at a rate far higher than others who do not maintain a comparable level of involvement (Assael et al., 2007; Feick & Price, 1987). Therefore, enduring involvement of the WOM sender is likely to amplify the dissemination of solicited WOM.

Proposition 17:       The proposed positive relationship between difficulty of evaluation and the dissemination of solicited positive WOM will be positively moderated by the enduring involvement of the WOM sender.

## 4 Method

On account of time and budget limitations, only a portion of the theoretical framework is empirically tested in the current thesis. This portion pertains to the prediction of the unsolicited post-consumption WOM category and to the conditioning effects of three types of consumption (i.e., hedonic, utilitarian, utilitarian). The remainder of the framework could be the focus of empirical investigation in future research. To empirically test the portion specified above, a correlational research design was chosen. Thus, constructs were measured, and relationships between constructs were assessed.

A correlational design is deemed suitable for this particular research project because of the nature of some of the phenomena investigated here. People's willingness to help and their evaluation of expectations fulfilment have been most often measured via self-report (Daniel, Bilgin, Brezina, Strohmeier, & Vainre, 2015; Giese & Cote, 2002). Because of this circumstance, manipulating the predictor constructs might not be the optimal approach. Therefore, in a circumstance like this, the use of a correlational research design, as opposed to an experimental design, is advisable (Stangor, 2010). More pertinently, a correlational design was chosen because practicality and the ability of marketing professionals to predict and influence the consumer behaviour of generating WOM was identified earlier among the goals of the theoretical framework proposed in the current research.

The current chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, the propositions that relate to the prediction of unsolicited post-consumption WOM and to the conditioning effects of consumption types are re-introduced as hypotheses and pictorially depicted. The subsequent three sections respectively describe the measurements used in the operationalisation of constructs, the research instrument that is used in data collection, and the sample of participants from whom data was derived.

### 4.1 Hypotheses

Proposition Two that was postulated in Section 3.3.1, and propositions Eleven, Twelve, and Thirteen, that were postulated respectively in Section 3.3.2.2, are re-introduced here as hypotheses One, Two, Three, and Four. They are the focus of empirical testing in the current research.

- Hypothesis 1: The dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM can be predicted by exceeding expectations and wanting to help collectively.
- Hypothesis 2: In a condition of high hedonic consumption, exceeding expectations will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than wanting to help.
- Hypothesis 3: In a condition of high utilitarian consumption, wanting to help will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than exceeding expectations.
- Hypothesis 4: In a condition of high utilidonic consumption, exceeding expectations will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than wanting to help.

Because the prediction of Hypothesis one focuses on the collective predictive power of two predictors, multiple regression analysis using SPSS was conducted to test this hypothesis. As for the predictions in Hypotheses Two, Three, and Four, because the proposed arguments here pertain to the relative predictive strength of one predictor in comparison to the other, hierarchical regression is viewed as an appropriate statistical technique to carry out the testing of these hypotheses. These hierarchical regressions were applied using SPSS as well.

Traditional analyses such as multiple and hierarchical regression are viewed as more appropriate than more recent analyses such as structural equation modelling (SEM). This view is predicated on three features that characterise the current research and the portion of it that is empirically tested. The first of these is the exploratory nature of the current research which is manifested in the new theoretical framework and in some of the new constructs comprised in it. Constructs such as exceeding expectations and the three WOM outcomes are new constructs the definition and operationalisation of which have not been thoroughly discussed in previous research. Thus, the objective of the proposed framework is theory building and prediction rather than theory testing and confirmation. Accordingly, regression analyses seem more appropriate than complex techniques such as SEM which is a confirmatory technique.

The second and third features that render the use of regression analyses more appropriate in the current research are the univariate nature of the tested portion of the framework and the absence of mediating constructs in it. As specified earlier, the portion of the framework that is empirically tested comprises only one dependent variable and two predictors.

Regression analyses are appropriate statistical procedures for testing such a straightforward model. On the other hand, a multivariate technique such as SEM would have been more appropriate had the tested model comprised more than one dependent variable.

Additionally, SEM would have been more appropriate had the tested model comprised variables that are exogenous and endogenous at the same time (i.e., mediation).

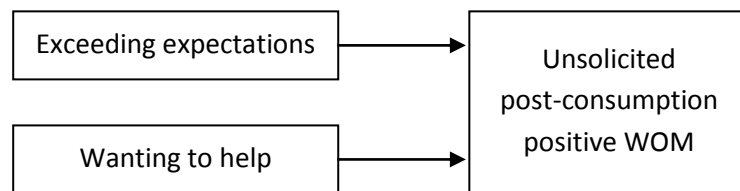
In addition to the four hypotheses listed above, two further hypotheses are appended to them. These additional two aim to gain more understanding of the conditioning effects of consumption types. Precisely, they seek to compare the effect that a single predictor has on the outcome WOM category across different conditions. That is, the strength of the effect of exceeding expectations on the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM in a hedonic condition is compared to the same effect in a utilitarian and a utilidonic conditions. Similarly, the strength of the effect of wanting to help on the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM in a hedonic condition is compared to the same effect in a utilitarian and a utilidonic conditions. Owing to the typological congruence between exceeding expectations and the hedonic type of consumption, the effect of exceeding expectations in the hedonic type of consumption should be the strongest in comparisons with the other two types of consumption. Likewise, the typological congruence between wanting to help and the utilitarian type of consumption should make the effect of wanting to help in the utilitarian type of consumption the strongest in comparison with the other types of consumption. Hence, the empirical tests undertaken in the current research also incorporate the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5:           The positive relationship between exceeding expectations and the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM will be **(a)** strongest in the hedonic condition, **(b)** weakest in the utilitarian condition, and **(c)** in between in the utilidonic condition.

Hypothesis 6:           The positive relationship between wanting to help and the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM will be

**(a)** strongest in the utilitarian condition, **(b)** weakest in the hedonic condition, and **(c)** in between in the utilidonic condition

To carry out the testing of Hypotheses Five and Six, a statistical technique known as the Fisher's r-to-z transformation technique was used. The six hypotheses posited above are pictorially depicted in figures 4.1 and 4.2 below. Figure 4.1 illustrates the first hypothesis, whereas the remaining five hypotheses are portrayed in Figure 4.2. Figure 4.2 comprises two columns; the left column contains hypotheses two, three, and four; whereas the right column contains hypotheses five and six.



*Figure 4.1 Hypothesis One*

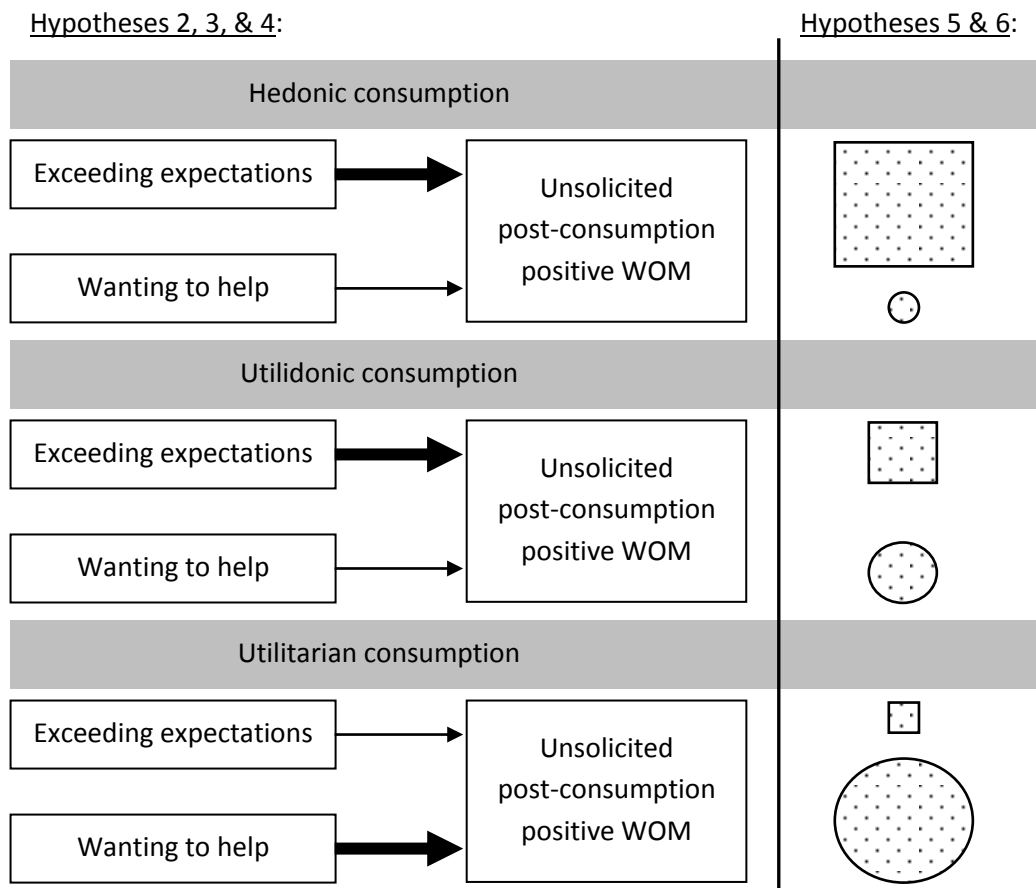




Figure 4.2Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6

The boldness of an arrow denotes the stronger predictor.

 t of exceeding expectations on WOM, “the size of the square denotes the strength of correlation”.  
 t of wanting to help on WOM, “the size of the circle denotes the strength of correlation”.

## 4.2 Measurements

Six constructs are investigated in the empirical model: exceeding expectations, wanting to help, hedonic consumption, utilitarian consumption, utilidonic consumption, and the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption WOM. The first two are predictors; the three consumption types are conditioning constructs; and the dissemination of WOM is the outcome. The two predictors and the outcome were measured. The three conditioning constructs on the other hand were prompted and not measured. That is, the hedonic, utilitarian, and utilidonic types of consumption were explained to research participants; and subsequently, participants were asked to identify three products they had consumed in the past that corresponded to those three types of consumption.



This manipulation of consumption type is deemed appropriate here in order to ensure that the effect of consumption is taken into account. Previous research such as Van den Berg, Manstead, Van der Pligt, and Wigboldus (2006) has demonstrated that the priming of cognitive and emotional information is effective in the recall and activation of cognitive and emotional attitudes respectively. Also, the majority of existing scales that measure hedonic and utilitarian products are multi-item scales such as the scales used by Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann (2003), Crowley et al. (1992), Batra and Ahtola (1991), and Mano and Oliver (1993). These scales could have been utilised as manipulation checks. However, given the number of constructs investigated here, this could have potentially prolonged the process of data collection and made it more cumbersome to research participants. More pertinently, Okada (2005) compared consumers' responses to a single-item scale of either hedonic or utilitarian consumption to a corresponding scale that measured the same consumption type, but is multi-item. The author reported a significant and positive correlation between the single-item scale and the index score of the multi-item scale.

The following sub-sections introduce the scales that the current research utilised in the measurement of exceeding expectations, wanting to help, and unsolicited post-consumption WOM dissemination. Exploratory factor analyses and Cronbach's alphas were recalculated prior to hypotheses testing to assess the psychometric properties of the two predictors (i.e., exceeding expectations and wanting to help). However, given the ratio nature of the WOM dissemination scale, there was no need for a similar assessment of this scale.

#### **4.2.1 Dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption WOM**

Existing measures of the behaviour of generating positive WOM can be divided into two types: measuring WOM that has actually occurred (Alsulaiman et al., 2015; Anderson, 1998; Mazzarol et al., 2007), and measuring consumers' intentions to generate WOM in the future (Eisingerich et al., 2015; Hartline & Jones, 1996; Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2012). The current research focuses on measuring actual WOM for two reasons. First, despite evidence that links intentions to behaviour (Sheeran, 2002), basing a theory on empirical investigation of actual behaviour seems more rigorous than investigation of intentions. This argument has been echoed within the WOM literature by Perkins (2012), Sweeney et al. (2012) and Leingpibul, Thomas, Broyles, and Ross (2009). Second, measuring actual WOM facilitates, as a matter of course, the identification of different aspects of this behaviour such as the strength of the

WOM message. Such aspects are impossible or at least difficult to measure if the behaviour has not actually occurred.

A brief review of existing measures of WOM dissemination is indicative of the contrast mentioned above between actual and intentional WOM. In scales that measured intentional WOM such as those used by Berger and Milkman (2012) and Cheung and Lee (2012), research participants were asked about the likelihood they would say positive things about their consumption experiences. Other measures of intentional WOM such as those utilised by Eisingerich et al. (2015), Thomas, Mullen, and Fraedrich (2011), Lee et al. (2012), and Hartline and Jones (1996), incorporated another WOM aspect beside the mere articulation of positive things; namely, the likelihood of explicitly recommending or advocating the product to other consumers. Nevertheless, no measure of intentional WOM has been detected in the literature that goes beyond the two aspects cited above (i.e., likelihood of saying positive things and likelihood of recommending).

In contrast, different WOM aspects, in addition to advocacy, have been identified and incorporated in the measurement of actual WOM. These aspects include the volume or amount of generated WOM (Anderson, 1998; Chen & Berger, 2013), frequency of generating WOM (Harrison-Walker, 2001), number of people who received the WOM message (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004), how detailed the message is (Alsulaiman et al., 2015; Sweeney et al., 2012), strength of advocacy, and richness, vividness, depth, and intensity of the message (Mazzarol et al., 2007). While these operationalisations of WOM delineate a broad array of the WOM dissemination phenomenon, they are nonetheless scattered across different scales. The scale that is used in the current research to measure the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption WOM is comprised of four items that are derived and adapted from the WOM dimensions cited above.

The first item measures the number of times unsolicited post-consumption WOM was generated. The second measures the number of times strong words were used when WOM was generated. The third measures the number of times an explicit recommendation was made when WOM was generated. This item seems to be especially relevant in the measurement of post-consumption WOM as opposed to pre-consumption WOM. Post-consumption WOM is more likely than consumption WOM to contain an element of advocacy because it is based on personal experience with the product. The fourth item

measures the number of times detailed information was included in the WOM message. All four items asked respondents to answer with a number; a stipulation that made this scale a ratio scale. The aim of this stipulation is to increase the chances of the collected data having higher levels of precision, variation, and flexibility than if the data was collected on an ordinal scale. To calculate an index score of the scale, the four items were basically added up.

#### **4.2.2 Exceeding expectations**

In general, there are two approaches to measuring the disconfirmation of consumers' pre-consumption expectations. The first measures the expectations and actual performance of the product or the actual benefits received upon consuming the product; and then objectively calculates the difference. The second approach measures, on an ordinal scale, the consumer's subjective judgement of the discrepancy between pre-consumption expectations and product performance or benefits received (Oliver, 1980). The second approach has been described as being richer and more accurate than the subtractive approach because it is more inclusive of the psychological processes that underlie the formation of the discrepancy judgement (Burke, Kovar, & Prenshaw, 2003; Tse & Wilton, 1988). Therefore, the subjective approach is employed in the current research to measure the construct of exceeding expectations. Nevertheless, most existing measures of disconfirmation of expectations seem to have a narrow focus that revolves around product performance or the core benefits received from the consumption experience (Halstead, Jones, & Cox, 2007).

In addition to the consumer's evaluation of the core benefits they receive, the current research measured the disconfirmation of two additional dimensions; namely, the purchasing experience and value for money. This is in line with the views of Kotler and Armstrong (2006) and of Schmitt (2003) which argue for the multi-dimensionality of consumption experiences beyond product performance. The purchasing experience item encompasses the interactions that the consumer encountered with the product provider prior to and during the finalisation of the purchase. Such interactions represent an important avenue through which consumers' expectations can be exceeded in a number of ways such as building trust with the consumer (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991) and demonstrating the skills and competence of the employees of the product provider

(Evanschitzky, Sharma, & Prykop, 2012). This item also subsumes the overall atmosphere of the place or the website where the product was purchased (Chang et al., 2013). Value for money on the other hand refers to all the utilities that the consumer received relative to the money they paid to purchase the product.

The addition of the two dimensions mentioned above created a three-item scale to measure the construct of exceeding expectations. The scale asked respondents to compare the product they consumed with the expectations they had prior to consumption in terms of three areas: purchasing, value for money, and use and consumption. This comparison was rated on five points ranging from one (much less than I expected, but still acceptable), to two (less than I expected, but still acceptable), to three (as I expected) to four (better than I expected), to five (much better than I expected). An index score of the scale was calculated by adding up the three items.

#### **4.2.3 Wanting to help**

Wanting to help was defined in previous sections of this thesis as the consumer's willingness to voluntarily fulfil the need of another consumer for advice and information. Additionally, it was noticed that in order for this willingness to arise, the prospective helper has to have knowledge superiority. Furthermore, two types of helping were identified; altruistic and egoistic. To capture all these properties, four dimensions are identified for the operationalisation of the construct of wanting to help. These four are knowledge superiority of the helper, willingness to help, the altruistic side of helping, and the egoistic side of helping. A seven-point scale was devised where the strength of the respondents' agreement or disagreement with six statements was measured.

One statement reads: "most people I talk to do not know much about this product or service". This statement captures the dimension of knowledge superiority. Another statement says: "I praise this product or service because I want to help others". This captures the consumer's general willingness to help. Other two statements read as follow: "I want to improve the wellbeing of other people by praising this product or service", and "I say positive things about this product or service because I want to give people the opportunity to make the right purchase decision". These two statements denote the altruistic side of helping. Lastly, the following two statements capture the egoistic side of helping; they read as follow: "saying positive things about this product or service reflects

well on me”, and “praising this product or service makes people regard me as knowledgeable”. Two of the six statements mentioned above were based on the concern-for-other-consumers scale that was developed by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004); specifically, they are the general willingness to help statement and the second statement of altruistic helping. An index score of the wanting to help scale was calculated by basically adding up the six items.

### **4.3 Research instrument**

In order to empirically test the hypotheses that are posited at the beginning of this chapter, an online questionnaire was developed and utilised for collecting data. Online questionnaires seem to be an appropriate means for data collection particularly in WOM research which is based mostly on self-report data. Anonymity of both the researcher and research participants is more likely to be maintained in questionnaires that are completed online or by mail compared to those administered face-to-face or over the phone (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012; Hewson, Laurent, & Vogel, 1996).

Lack of anonymity could possibly have a negative impact on the quality or accuracy of the collected data. For instance, exposing the identity of either the researcher or the research participants could possibly lead the participant to answer questions in a way that is different to when those identities are not revealed (Hewson et al., 1996). Such influence could be the result of social desirability bias (i.e., the participant’s desire to provide an answer that is viewed favourably by the researcher) (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012); it could be the result of acquiescence bias (i.e., the participant’s tendency to agree with the questions or statements they are responding to) (Joinson & Paine, 2007); or it could be the result of the pressure to conform to social norms which participants might feel when identities are revealed. All these artificial influences can be greatly eliminated when the anonymity of research participants and of the researcher and the confidentiality of collected data are assured (Hewson et al., 1996).

At the outset of the questionnaire, assurances were given to respondents of the anonymity of their identity and of the confidentiality of the information they provide. Subsequently, word of mouth (WOM) was identified as the focus of the questionnaire. Next, a brief and simplified summary was provided that included an explanation of what WOM dissemination is, when it is unsolicited, when it is solicited, when it is positive, and when it is negative. This

summary was written in a way that was meant to be comprehensible to lay people. Following this introduction, the questionnaire was divided into four sections. Respondents could navigate from the introductory page and then from one section to another by clicking a button at the bottom of the screen.

The first section of the questionnaire collected the respondents' demographic information, which included their age, gender, their highest level of education, and their occupation. Collecting these demographic details is consistent with previous WOM studies in which similar information was collected (Han & Ryu, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sotiriadis & Van Zyl, 2013). The second, third, and fourth sections of the questionnaire were respectively dedicated to the respondents' hedonic, utilitarian, and utilitarian consumption experiences. At the beginning of each of these three sections, respondents were given three concise definitions of hedonic, utilitarian, and utilitarian products. In the second section, they were asked to recall a hedonic product that they had purchased in the past and about which they had generated unsolicited positive WOM at least once. In the third and fourth sections, similar requirements were made about utilitarian and utilitarian products respectively. Asking respondents to recall a past consumption experience is a method that has often been utilised in WOM studies (Sundaram et al., 1998; Sweeney et al., 2012; Yap et al., 2013).

After identifying the product they thought of, respondents answered the four items of the WOM dissemination scale. Subsequent to measuring WOM dissemination, respondents answered the six items of the wanting-to-help scale, and then the three-item scale of exceeding expectations. In the wanting-to-help scale, which is an ordinal scale, there were two dimensions that were each measured with two items (i.e., altruistic helping and egoistic helping). The two items measuring each of these two dimensions were separated by other items within the scale. Additionally, an empty item without a statement was added to the wanting-to-help scale in one of the three conditions, which directly asked respondents to choose the rating of strongly-agree. If a respondent did not rate this item as required, this would indicate that they might not have been reading the questions carefully; and thus, the responses received from this respondent would be excluded. Furthermore, the time it took each respondent to complete the entire questionnaire was measured. It was reasoned that completion of the questionnaire in less than five minutes would be indicative of the low attention they paid to the questions. All these measures were taken in order to reduce as much as possible the response bias in the collected data.

Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was pilot-tested on a small sample of respondents that included university students and academic experts in marketing and in other disciplines. They were invited to complete the questionnaire and also to comment on its content and design. The aim of this pilot-test was to refine the questionnaire further and assess its face validity, readability, and clarity. A number of suggestions emerged from this pilot-test in regard to the instructions of the questionnaire, the wording of the questions, and the ease of completing the questionnaire online. Some of these suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire which is provided in Appendix A. One important issue that arose from the pilot-test was the coding of the respondents' answers to the WOM dissemination scale. While the four items of the scale clearly required respondents to answer with a number, it was evident from the pilot-test that some respondents answered some of these items with an estimate that allowed for a range of possible numbers. For example, some respondents to the pilot-test provided an answer of "five to ten" to the question of how many times did they disseminate positive WOM. Others answered the same question with the number fifteen followed by a plus sign, which presumably meant that they had generated WOM about the selected product fifteen times or more.

To remedy these anomalies, it was decided that the wording of the items should be upheld, and that a coding scheme that is logical, replicable, and consistently applicable should be devised to recode imprecise answers. When the respondent's answer comprised a finite range of possible numbers, that answer should be recoded as the average of the two extreme points in the range. For example, if the answer was "five to ten", the recoded data entry of that answer should be seven point five. When the respondent's answer comprised an infinite range of possible numbers, that answer should be recoded as the lowest possible number plus one. For example, if the answer was fifteen followed by a plus sign, the recoded data entry of that answer should be sixteen.

#### **4.4 Sampling and procedure**

To test the hypotheses proposed in the current research, a sample of consumers was recruited. The recruitment of this sample was outsourced to an online data collection company called Qualtrics ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)). The employment of data collection companies for sampling purposes has recently started to emerge within academic studies (Kwona, Ratneshwarb, & Thorsonc, 2017; Thomas et al., 2011; Vigar-Ellis, Pitt, & Caruana,

2015). Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling (2011) found that research samples acquired through Amazon's MTurk, which is a data collection company similar to Qualtrics, were highly diverse and representative of the population. Further, they found the psychometric properties of data obtained via these samples to be of high standards. The size of the sample and the characteristics of respondents were decided by the researcher and communicated to Qualtrics. Subsequently, Qualtrics randomly selected the required sample from its pool of respondents who number in the millions and are located all across the world. For instance, the company's pool of respondents in North America is about six million, and in the South-Eastern Asia region which includes Australia and New Zealand, the company has about six point four million respondents ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)).

Selected respondents were sent an email message that invited them to complete a questionnaire for research purposes. To avoid self-selection bias on the part of the respondent, no further details were given in the invitation in regard to the content of the questionnaire. In return for completing the questionnaire, respondents were compensated. Upon becoming members of Qualtrics' pool of respondents, these respondents would have received information from Qualtrics explaining the range of and availability of incentives and the terms and mechanisms by which such incentives were to be rewarded. The researcher was not privy to these terms and mechanisms. In general however, the value of compensation depended on the length of the research instrument, the characteristics of the target sample, and the difficulty of acquiring that sample. The specific types of compensation may include cash, airline miles, redeemable points, sweepstake entrance, and vouchers.

The size of the sample was eventually set at four hundred respondents. The initial sample size was determined by multiplying the number of constructs investigated in the study by thirty (Creswell, 2005). This yielded a sample size of one hundred and eighty. Nevertheless, it was decided that this number could be increased to two hundred and then doubled to four hundred. The decision to increase the sample size from what was originally calculated was driven by a number of factors. First, the increase could account for potential data exclusion. Second, the research budget allowed for the recruitment of more respondents. Third, increasing the sample size could reduce the probability of making type two inferential error. Fourth, the representativeness and normality of the sample could be enhanced by increasing the sample size (Stangor, 2010). Fifth, the increase would allow the total sample size to



sufficiently have different subgroups within it. For example, it would be possible to have two sets of two hundred respondents from two different geographical locations. This would be beneficial for generalisability.

The level of analysis in the current research is focused on the individual consumer. Additionally, as alluded to previously in Section 1.3.1.3, the current research seeks to de-emphasise the role played by a particular group of consumers such as market mavens or opinion leaders in the propagation of WOM; and place more focus on the majority of regular and perhaps less influential consumers. Accordingly, no special characteristics of the sample were stipulated to Qualtrics except for a few. The four-hundred sample needed to be split in half between two geographical locations: New Zealand and the United States. This characteristic was stipulated in order to add geographical diversity to the study and increase the generalisability of the findings. New Zealand was chosen because it is where the researcher was located; and the United States was chosen mainly for budgetary reasons, as the cost of recruiting Qualtrics' respondents was cheaper when drawn from the United States, which is where Qualtrics is headquartered. Data on respondents' location was collected based on their IP addresses.

Another stipulation about the required sample was that each half of the sample needed to be split in half by gender. A third stipulation was the respondents' age. Six age cohorts were delineated starting from people who were at least eighteen years old to people who were sixty-eight or older. In order to ensure the maximum level possible of age diversity, a logic was set by Qualtrics whereby no single age cohort could contribute more than a third of the total sample size.

## 5 Results

As indicated in the method chapter, a number of steps were taken to carry out the empirical investigation of the current research. These steps included sampling, developing measurements of the studied constructs, and statistically testing relationships between constructs. The current chapter reports the results of these exercises in four sections. The first section contains a description of the sample of respondents recruited in the study. The second presents and evaluates the psychometric properties of the interval scales that measured the two predictors. The assessment was carried out through exploratory factor and internal consistency analyses. The third section contains descriptive statistics about the collected data of the measured constructs. Such statistics include, among others, means, standard deviations, and ranges of scores. An examination of the collected data against a number of correlation assumptions is presented in both sections three and four. Upon examining these assumptions, the fourth section then proceeds with statistical tests of the hypotheses which include a number of regression analyses and Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation tests.

### 5.1 Participants

Data was collected by Qualtrics from a sample of four hundred consumers as specified by the researcher. In addition to these four hundred, Qualtrics voluntarily collected data from four more consumers in New Zealand and from another four in the United States as alternates. This addition increased the overall sample size to four hundred and eight. Two hundred and four were recruited from New Zealand, and the other two hundred and four were recruited from the United States. Each half of the sample was equally distributed in terms of gender. In terms of age, out of the overall sample of four hundred and eight, one hundred and forty-nine respondents (36.52%) were between the ages of eighteen years old and forty-seven; two hundred and fifty-seven (62.99%) were older than forty-seven; and two respondents (0.49%) declined to report their age.

In the New Zealand sub-sample, one hundred and two (50.00%) were between the ages of eighteen years old and forty-seven; one hundred and one (49.51%) were older than forty-seven; and one respondent did not report their age (0.49%). In the US sub-sample, forty-seven respondents (23.04%) were between eighteen and forty-seven years old; one hundred

and fifty-six (76.47%) were older than forty-seven; and one respondent did not reveal their age (0.49%). It is noticeable that the New Zealand sub-sample is more diverse in terms of age compared to the American sub-sample or the overall sample which are all slightly skewed to old age cohorts. Table 5.1 breaks down the distribution of respondents across different age cohorts. In terms of respondents' highest level of education, approximately similar proportions of respondents are spread across different educational levels including high school, vocational training, and different levels of tertiary education.

*Table 5.1 Respondents by age cohorts*

Age	Overall		NZ		US	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
18 - 22	17	4.17	16	7.84	1	0.49
23 - 27	28	6.86	20	9.80	8	3.92
28 - 32	26	6.37	13	6.37	13	6.37
33 - 37	24	5.88	16	7.84	8	3.92
38 - 42	25	6.13	18	8.82	7	3.43
43 - 47	29	7.11	19	9.31	10	4.90
48 - 52	34	8.33	22	10.78	12	5.88
53 - 57	39	9.56	19	9.31	20	9.80
58 - 62	33	8.09	7	3.43	26	12.75
63 - 67	42	10.29	18	8.82	24	11.76
68 +	109	26.72	35	17.16	74	36.27
n/a	2	0.49	1	0.49	1	0.49
<b>Total</b>	<b>408</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100</b>

Additionally, for the sake of juxtaposing the sample recruited in the current research with samples that were utilised in previous WOM studies, Table 5.2 is presented. While the characteristics of the sample used in the current research seem to bear a resemblance to the samples used in previous studies, the current sample might contribute slightly new dimensions in terms of age and geographical location. As Table 5.2 shows, most previous samples seem to be recruited from only one location, whereas the current one is sourced from two. Also, young age cohorts seem to be overly represented in previous WOM studies. Therefore, the current sample contributes to the balancing of this disparity in the literature.

*Table 5.2 Characteristics of samples recruited in previous WOM research*

<b>Study</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Age</b>
Bone (1992)	321	n/a	72% under the age of 45
Sundaram et al. (1998)	363	USA	Mean age = 40
Gremler et al. (2001)	1671	n/a	Mean age = 48
Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004)	2063	Germany	Mean age = 30.25
Sun et al. (2006)	250	USA	Range = 18 - 25
Godes and Mayzlin (2009)	180	USA	Mean age = 36.44
Jayawardhena and Wright (2009)	626	United Kingdom	82.7% under the age of 41
Thomas et al. (2011)	476	USA	Range = 18 - 65
Cheung and Lee (2012)	203	Hong Kong	67% from 21 to 25
Han and Ryu (2012)	261	USA	Mean age = 40.84
Lee et al. (2012)	160	USA	Median = 20
Sweeney et al. (2012)	500	n/a	n/a
Abrantes, Seabra, Lages, and Jayawardhena (2013)	302	Portugal	Range = 18 - 35
Martin and Lueg (2013)	546	n/a	Mean age = 32
Sotiriadis and Van Zyl (2013)	500	Europe & South Africa	91% under the age of 46
Yap et al. (2013)	201	Australia	64% under the age of 45
The current research	408	New Zealand & USA	62.9% above the age of 47

## **5.2 Psychometric properties of measurements**

To assess the underlying structure of the nine items that make up the two scales of the two predictor variables, three separate exploratory factor analyses were conducted using SPSS. These nine items comprised the six items of the wanting-to-help scale and the three items of the exceeding-expectations scale. They are presented in Table 5.3.

*Table 5.3 Measurement items of the predictor variables*

Scale	#	Item
Wanting to help	Hlp-1	Saying positive things about this product or service reflects well on me.
	Hlp-2	Most people I talk to do not know much about this product or service.
	Hlp-3	I want to improve the wellbeing of other people by praising this product or service.
	Hlp-4	Praising this product or service makes people regard me as knowledgeable.
	Hlp-5	I say positive things about this product or service because I want to give people the opportunity to make the right purchase decision.
	Hlp-6	I praise this product or service because I want to help others.
Exceeding expectations	Exp-1	Purchase experience
	Exp-2	Value for money
	Exp-3	Consumption / usage experience

The reason for conducting three separate factor analyses was to adhere to the assumption of sample homogeneity. Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2006) argue that prior to conducting a factor analysis, the sample should not contain sub-groups whose answers to scale items are known to or expected to be systematically different. The authors cited gender as an example. They advised against utilising a sample that contains both female and male subjects in a factor analysis for items that are known to or expected to differ because of gender. Combining the two sub-samples in one factor analysis, they argued, is likely to reflect an inaccurate picture of the items' structure for each group. As outlined in the method chapter, the effects of the two predictor constructs on the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption WOM are expected to be different across different consumption conditions. Therefore, heeding the advice of Hair et al. (2006), it was reasoned that conducting three separate factor analyses, one for each consumption condition, was the appropriate course to take.

In addition to the assumption of sample homogeneity, other factor analysis assumptions have been mentioned in the literature which pertain to the sample size and correlation between the analysed items. These two assumptions were also checked. In regard to the assumption of sample size, several authors concur that conducting a factor analysis for a

particular dataset is suitable when the dataset has a sufficiently large sample size (Pallant, 2011). Different recommendations have been made of how large a sample should be ranging from one hundred (Hair et al., 2006) to three hundred (Tabachnic & Fidell, 2007).

Alternatively, a sample size that is appropriate for factor analysis can be determined by multiplying the number of items to be analysed by five (Hair et al., 2006). The sample size in the current research is four hundred and eight. Every respondent in the sample answered the nine items of the predictor constructs three different times; one time for each consumption type. Therefore, the sample size within each of the three factor analyses conducted in the current research was also four hundred and eight. Based on the recommendations reviewed above, a sample size of four hundred and eight makes the collected data sufficient for conducting a factor analysis. Thus, the assumption of adequate sample size is also satisfied.

Another assumption that needs to be addressed prior to conducting factor analysis is the presence of correlations between at least some of the analysed items (Hair et al., 2006). A number of methods and statistics have been suggested to assess the satisfaction of this assumption. One way is to search the correlation matrix for correlation coefficients that are  $r = 0.30$  or greater (Pallant, 2011). Another test to examine this assumption is a statistic known as Bartlette's test of sphericity. This statistic denotes the significance of the correlations between the analysed items (Hair et al., 2006). Another statistic used to test this assumption is called the measure of sampling adequacy (MSA). This statistic measures the predictability of one of the analysed items by the other items; and it ranges from zero to one. In general, the closer this measure is to one, the higher the degree of correlation between the analysed items, and the more suitable the dataset is for factor analysis (Hair et al., 2006). Nevertheless, a value of 0.60 has been suggested as an acceptable value of this measure (Hair et al., 2006; Pallant, 2011).

The above-mentioned assessments of item inter-correlations were applied to the three datasets that were subjected to three separate factor analyses in the current research. Tables 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6 contain the correlation coefficients between the analysed scales items within each dataset. These three correlation matrices show a number of correlations that are equal to or greater than  $r = 0.30$ , which indicates that the assumption of inter-correlation is satisfactorily met in the three datasets.

Table 5.4 Correlations between items of the two predictor variables in the hedonic dataset

	Hlp-1	Hlp-2	Hlp-3	Hlp-4	Hlp-5	Hlp-6	Exp-1	Exp-2	Exp-3
Hlp-1	1.00								
Hlp-2	.239	1.00							
Hlp-3	.445	.356	1.00						
Hlp-4	.551	.336	.540	1.00					
Hlp-5	.409	.245	.593	.544	1.00				
Hlp-6	.408	.234	.647	.558	.756	1.00			
Exp-1	.260	.106	.217	.153	.198	.212	1.00		
Exp-2	.209	.163	.163	.111	.125	.164	.485	1.00	
Exp-3	.227	.131	.195	.141	.161	.166	.485	.549	1.00

Table 5.5 Correlations between items of the two predictor variables in the utilitarian dataset

	Hlp-1	Hlp-2	Hlp-3	Hlp-4	Hlp-5	Hlp-6	Exp-1	Exp-2	Exp-3
Hlp-1	1.00								
Hlp-2	.214	1.00							
Hlp-3	.527	.351	1.00						
Hlp-4	.708	.313	.660	1.00					
Hlp-5	.504	.353	.727	.574	1.00				
Hlp-6	.494	.355	.785	.607	.802	1.00			
Exp-1	.232	.169	.162	.198	.232	.228	1.00		
Exp-2	.243	.156	.171	.164	.223	.210	.542	1.00	
Exp-3	.304	.186	.287	.269	.304	.292	.471	.580	1.00

Table 5.6 Correlations between items of the two predictor variables in the utilitarian dataset

	Hlp-1	Hlp-2	Hlp-3	Hlp-4	Hlp-5	Hlp-6	Exp-1	Exp-2	Exp-3
Hlp-1	1.00								
Hlp-2	.276	1.00							
Hlp-3	.536	.405	1.00						
Hlp-4	.707	.418	.652	1.00					
Hlp-5	.529	.355	.691	.591	1.00				
Hlp-6	.527	.355	.751	.617	.835	1.00			
Exp-1	.293	.216	.303	.258	.362	.382	1.00		
Exp-2	.250	.187	.248	.212	.303	.286	.483	1.00	
Exp-3	.276	.209	.251	.216	.250	.252	.458	.508	1.00

Furthermore, the values of Bartlette's test of sphericity across the three datasets were all significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) and the MSA values were 0.81, 0.83, and 0.84 for the hedonic, utilitarian, and utilidonic datasets respectively. This gives a further indication of the suitability of all the three datasets for factor analysis as all values are above the recommended cut-off threshold of 0.60.

In each of the three exploratory factor analyses, the presence of two components with eigenvalues exceeding one was revealed. In the hedonic dataset, the two components explained 40.91% and 19.11% of the variance respectively; in the utilitarian dataset, the two components respectively explained 46.47% and 18.39% of the variance; and in the utilidonic dataset, the two components explained 48.34% and 16.10% of the variance respectively.

Inspections of the screeplot of each of the three datasets indicated a clear break after the second component. Accordingly, it was decided to retain two components for further investigation. The screeplots and the tables of unrotated loadings for the three datasets are provided in Appendices B-1, B-2, and B-3. In the hedonic dataset, a two-component solution explained a total of 60.02% of the variance; in the utilitarian dataset, a two-component solution explained 64.87% of the variance; and in the utilidonic dataset, a similar two-component solution explained 64.45% of the variance. To aid in the interpretation of these results, Oblimin rotation was performed. In each of the three datasets, the rotation resulted in both components showing a number of strong loadings and all items substantially loading on one component. This is reflected in Tables 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9 in the pattern coefficients sections. The two factor solutions that were revealed across the three datasets lend credence to the face and content validity of the two scales that were used in the measurement of the predictor constructs (wanting to help and exceeding expectations).



Table 5.7 Pattern and structure matrix for the hedonic dataset with Oblimin rotation

Item	Pattern coefficients		Structure coefficients	
	Component 1	Component 2	Component 1	Component 2
Hlp-6	.856	-.047	.843	.198
Hlp-5	.847	-.070	.827	.172
Hlp-4	.821	-.079	.798	.156
Hlp-3	.818	-.004	.817	.230
Hlp-1	.626	.146	.668	.325
Hlp-2	.448	.063	.466	.191
Exp-2	-.036	.844	.206	.834
Exp-3	-.004	.830	.233	.829
Exp-1	.053	.772	.274	.787

**Note:** major loadings “greater than .40” for each item are shaded

Table 5.8 Pattern and structure matrix for the utilitarian dataset with Oblimin rotation

Item	Pattern coefficients		Structure coefficients	
	Component 1	Component 2	Component 1	Component 2
Hlp-3	.913	-.088	.883	.225
Hlp-6	.891	-.030	.881	.275
Hlp-5	.860	-.002	.860	.293
Hlp-4	.843	-.044	.828	.245
Hlp-1	.703	.085	.732	.325
Hlp-2	.457	.070	.482	.227
Exp-2	-.054	.883	.248	.864
Exp-1	-.018	.813	.260	.807
Exp-3	.103	.777	.369	.812

**Note:** major loadings “greater than .40” for each item are shaded

Table 5.9 Pattern and structure matrix for the utilidonic dataset with Oblimin rotation

Item	Pattern coefficients		Structure coefficients	
	Component 1	Component 2	Component 1	Component 2
Hlp-4	.884	-.099	.878	.374
Hlp-3	.877	-.037	.861	.317
Hlp-6	.868	.023	.878	.374
Hlp-5	.842	.037	.857	.377
Hlp-1	.743	.028	.754	.327
Hlp-2	.512	.059	.536	.266
Exp-2	-.029	.840	.310	.828
Exp-3	-.037	.831	.299	.816
Exp-1	.098	.742	.398	.782

**Note:** major loadings “greater than .40” for each item are shaded

In addition to factor analyses, the internal consistency of the scales measuring the two predictor constructs was also analysed. Cronbach’s alpha was calculated three times for each of the two scales. In each, a different dataset was used which represented either the hedonic, utilitarian, or the utilidonic types of consumption. All the Cronbach’s alphas were above 0.70. For the wanting to help scale, the Cronbach’s alphas were 0.82 for the hedonic dataset, 0.86 for the utilitarian dataset, and 0.87 for the utilidonic dataset. For the exceeding expectations scale, the Cronbach’s alphas were 0.75 for the hedonic dataset, 0.77 for the utilitarian dataset, and 0.73 for the utilidonic dataset. Across all the reliability calculations presented above, no item-total correlation below 0.30 was detected, which gives a further indication that both scales had high internal consistency.

### 5.3 Descriptive data

Table 5.10 presents a descriptive summary of the measured constructs in the current study. These constructs are wanting to help, exceeding expectations, and dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM. For each construct, the table displays the number of cases, the minimum and maximum scores measured, the range of collected scores, the median and mode scores, the mean score, the standard deviation, the variance, the five per cent trimmed mean score, the statistics of Kolmogorov-Smirnov, skewness, and kurtosis, and the z-values of skewness and kurtosis. The five per cent trimmed mean is a

recalculated mean of the collected cases after removing five per cent from the top and the bottom of the collected scores. The skewness statistic assesses how symmetrical the distribution of the collected scores is. The kurtosis statistic indicates how peaked or flat the distribution of the collected data is relative to a normal distribution, with positive kurtosis values denoting peaked distributions and negative values denoting flat distributions (Hair et al., 2006). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic assesses the normality of a distribution by calculating the level of significance of the difference between the distribution at hand and a normal distribution (Pallant, 2011).

Table 5.10 Descriptive statistics

	Hedonic			Utilitarian			Utilidonic		
	WOM	Wanting to help	Exceeding expectations	WOM	Wanting to help	Exceeding expectations	WOM	Wanting to help	Exceeding expectations
<b>Cases</b>	408	408	408	408	408	408	408	408	408
<b>Minimum</b>	1.00	90.00	3.00	1.00	90.00	3.00	1.00	90.00	3.00
<b>Maximum</b>	450.00	126.00	15.00	375.00	126.00	15.00	310.00	126.00	15.00
<b>Range</b>	449.00	36.00	12.00	374.00	36.00	12.00	309.00	36.00	12.00
<b>Mode</b>	4.00	108.00	9.00	4.00	108.00	9.00	4.00	112.00	11.00
<b>Median</b>	10.00	110.00	11.00	5.00	110.00	11.00	7.50	111.00	11.00
<b>Mean</b>	25.83	109.74	10.91	13.38	109.77	10.78	17.32	110.37	11.07
<b>Standard deviation</b>	53.81	6.86	1.98	30.47	7.15	2.10	32.52	7.13	2.00
<b>Variance</b>	2896.32	47.08	3.92	929.00	51.19	4.41	1058.07	50.95	4.00
<b>5% trimmed mean</b>	15.96	110.01	10.88	8.42	110.00	10.77	11.78	110.61	11.07
<b>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</b>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Skewness</b>	4.88	- 0.62	0.29	6.85	- 0.56	0.18	4.85	- 0.58	0.02
<b>Kurtosis</b>	27.63	0.84	0.03	62.12	0.55	-0.01	29.81	0.51	0.06
<b>Skewness z value</b>	40.24	- 5.11	2.39	56.48	- 4.61	1.48	39.99	- 4.78	0.16
<b>Kurtosis z value</b>	113.92	3.46	0.12	256.12	2.26	- 0.04	122.90	2.10	0.24

In order for regression analysis to be conducted with a high level of rigor, a few assumptions need to be met. Some of these assumptions pertain to aspects of the dataset such as the sample size, univariate outliers, and normality; and some are pertinent to the interaction between measured constructs such as multicollinearity, linearity, and homoscedasticity (Hair et al., 2006; Pallant, 2011). Assumptions of the former type are discussed in this section, whereas those of the latter type are discussed in the subsequent section. Some of the above-mentioned assumptions can be evaluated by examining some of the information provided in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10 indicates a sample of four hundred and eight cases for each construct. This number seems to be amply sufficient for conducting regression analyses that involve two independent variables. According to the recommendation given by Stevens (1996), two independent variables would require at least a total of thirty cases. Tabachnic and Fidell (2007) on the other hand recommended sixty-six cases for a regression analysis that involves two independent variables. Therefore, the requirement of a sufficient number of cases for conducting a regression analysis seems to be satisfied. Another requirement that needs to be examined prior to applying a statistical technique such as regression analysis is the absence of outlier scores in the data. Obviously, the presence of these scores can substantially shift the mean score of a particular construct, and subsequently, the utilisation of inferential statistical techniques might yield results that inaccurately describe the population and hence are not generalisable (Hair et al., 2006).

In the current dataset, an initial assessment of the presence and impact of outliers can be gleaned from the mean and the 5% trimmed mean rows in Table 5.10. A large difference between the mean and the trimmed mean can be interpreted as an indication that outliers are potentially having an undesirable impact on the central tendency of the data. In the table for the hedonic dataset, the difference between the mean score and the trimmed mean of the WOM dissemination construct is 9.86, which is substantial; whereas for the predictor constructs, wanting to help and exceeding expectations, the difference between the mean and the trimmed mean is negligible. Similarly, in the utilitarian and utilitarian datasets, the mean scores of WOM dissemination are considerably different from the trimmed means; whereas for the predictor constructs, the two values are fairly close. This can be interpreted as an initial indication that the construct of WOM dissemination contains

a number of outlier scores across the three types of consumption, and that these scores need to be addressed prior to conducting the regression analysis.

An additional assumption that needs to be satisfied when conducting a regression analysis is normality of the collected scores. This refers to the degree to which the collected scores of a single construct cluster around the mean in a symmetrical pattern (Hair et al., 2006). To assess the satisfaction of this assumption in the current datasets, both statistical and graphical diagnostics are used. One of the statistical tests of normality cited here is the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Significance values of more than 0.05 indicate normality (Pallant, 2011). A look at Table 5.10 shows that no construct in the current study has a normal distribution if the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic were to be used as the sole gauge of normality. However, one of the limitations of this test that has been raised in the literature is that it is highly sensitive to extreme scores (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012).

Perhaps less stringent assessments of normality are the z-value tests of skewness and kurtosis mentioned in Tabachnic and Fidell (2007) and in Hair et al. (2006). For skewness, one test calculates a z-value by dividing the skewness statistic by the square root of the division of six by the sample size. For kurtosis, another test calculates a z-value by dividing the kurtosis statistic by the square root of the division of twenty-four by the sample size. The results of these two calculations for every construct are at the two bottom rows in Table 5.10. If either of these two z-values is greater than the significance level of either 0.01 or 0.05 which correspond respectively to the z-values of  $\pm 2.58$  and  $\pm 1.96$ , then the distribution of the construct in question can be deemed non-normal. The table shows that using this test, only the construct of exceeding expectations has normal distributions across the three conditions.

One drawback of these statistical tests of normality is that they are sensitive to large sample sizes (Hair et al., 2006; Pallant, 2011). Hair et al. (2006) therefore, strongly recommended the utilisation of graphical plots in addition to statistical tests to assess normality. In Appendices C-1 to C-9, two figures are provided for each of the measured constructs in all three conditions. These two figures are a histogram of the scores and the normal probability plot. The normal probability plot is a graphical illustration of how comparable a particular data distribution is to a normal distribution (Hair et al., 2006). It contains a diagonal line at 45 degrees; this line represents a normal distribution. The plot also contains the measured

scores plotted over the diagonal line. The closer the pattern of the scores is to the diagonal line, the more normal the distribution; the more they deviate from the line, the less normal the distribution.

An examination of the figures in Appendices C-1 to C-9 shows that the assumption of normality is severely violated in the WOM dissemination construct across the three types of consumption. This is evident in the highly peaked and positively skewed distributions of this construct across the three conditions. With respect to the constructs of wanting to help and exceeding expectations, normality can be described as acceptable across the three types of consumption. Therefore, the assumption of normality for the two predictor constructs can be deemed satisfactorily met, according to visual assessments of the data distributions.

In addition to the characteristics outlined above, there is a possibility that the data for both the outcome and the predictor constructs was influenced by participant response bias. Response bias is an umbrella term that refers to a respondent tendency to misstate their true answers to survey questions (Fischer, 2004; Kalton & Schuman, 1982). This distortion of true answers can be manifested in several ways. One is called the social desirability bias; it refers to the respondent's tendency to answer a question in a way that would present them in a favourable light regardless of what they truly think about how to answer the question (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2003). Another form is known as acquiescence response bias; it occurs when research participants who are asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with a number of statements choose to agree with those statements without due attention to the content of the statements (Kalton & Schuman, 1982). Another form is known as extreme response bias; it occurs when research participants seem to be systematically drawn to the extreme ends of possible answers (Fischer, 2004). A fourth form of response bias, which is called modesty response bias, occurs when respondents systematically choose a neutral point on a scale such as the point of "neither agree or disagree" (Fischer, 2004).

The conjecture that the data could have been influenced by response bias is based on a number of observations. First, the research instrument asked respondents to identify a product about which they had generated unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM at least once. This instruction, which specified the minimum volume of WOM required for completing the questionnaire, might have primed this minimum figure of WOM volume in

respondents' minds when they gave their responses. The plausibility of this possibility is corroborated by the respondents' answers to the first item of the WOM scale, which asked how many times did they generate WOM messages. In the utilitarian and utilidonic datasets, most respondents answered this item with one. Specifically, one hundred and fifty generated unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM about a utilitarian product exactly one time. This number represented thirty-six per cent of the sample. In the utilidonic dataset, one hundred and nineteen did the same about a utilidonic product, which represented twenty nine per cent of the sample. In the hedonic dataset, an answer of one to this item was not the most frequent; however, it was the second most frequent answer. Fifty-seven respondents gave an answer of one to this question, representing fourteen per cent of the sample. The most frequent answer to this question in the hedonic dataset was two. This answer was given by seventy-nine respondents who represented nineteen per cent of the sample.

The second observation upon which response bias is suspected to have influenced the respondents' answers is related to the maximum possible answers respondents could give to the WOM volume question. The research instrument did not specify an upper limit to how many times respondents generated WOM messages. Additionally, the WOM scale was not an ordinal scale through which a maximum answer can be predetermined. These circumstances might have possibly allowed some respondents to provide some extreme numbers that perhaps were biased and inaccurate. For example, in the hedonic dataset, the maximum answer given was two hundred; and in the utilitarian and utilidonic datasets, the maximum answer given was one hundred. In this case, scepticism about the accuracy of very high numbers seems to be a valid criticism. However, given the availability nowadays of web applications that provide tools to analyse people's activities on social media, a counter argument could be made that people do have the ability to easily retain a precise number of how many times they talked positively about a particular product on social media irrespective of the extremity of that number. In light of these two opposing views, it is difficult to determine which answer to the WOM volume question was extreme and biased and which was not.

A third observation that further supports the plausibility of response bias effects on the collected data can be detected from respondents' answers to the wanting to help scale. In the majority of this scale's six items and across the datasets, most respondents tended to



choose the neutral point (neither agree nor disagree). This tendency was particularly evident in the two items that measured the egoistic dimension of helping. The most frequent response to these two items in all three datasets was the neutral choice. As for the two items that measured the altruistic dimension of helping, more responses tended to fall into the agree side of the scale. These patterns could be interpreted as being the results of the participants' response bias. The participants' tendency to choose the neutral point on the scale when answering the egoistic helping items could have been influenced by their modesty response bias; and their tendency to agree with the altruistic helping statements could have been influenced by their social desirability bias. Due to this possible bias in the scores, some items in the scale could be contributing to the index score of the scale disproportionately in comparison with the other items.

A fourth observation of a possible response bias in the data is related to the scale of exceeding expectations, and in particular, its order within the questionnaire. For each of the three consumption types, the scale of exceeding expectations was placed after the scale of wanting to help. Because of the different thinking modes evoked by these two constructs, thinking about the wanting to help items might have attenuated how respondents answered the exceeding expectations items. As argued previously, the construct of wanting to help is likely to be associated with the rational mode of thinking, whereas the construct of exceeding expectations is likely to be associated with the experiential mode of thinking. Placing the measurement that is associated with the analytical and slower mode of thinking before the measurement that is associated with the affective and faster mode of thinking might have attenuated respondents' answers to the latter.

This conjecture suggested in the paragraph above can be supported by a finding that was reported by Swann et al. (1987). The authors measured participants' cognitive and affective reactions to evaluations of certain tasks they were required to perform. Cognitive reactions included the participants' perception of the criteria by which they were evaluated, their perceived accuracy of the evaluation, and their perceived competency of the evaluator. Affective reactions included the participants' mood, depression, hostility, and anxiety. The authors found that when participants received a positive evaluation of their performance, they displayed a clear preference to both the evaluation and the evaluator. However, this strong and positive attitude occurred only when the affective reactions were measured before the cognitive reactions. When the participants' cognitive reactions were measured

first, their positive attitude toward the received evaluation and the evaluator was not as strong.

Similar to the effect cited above from Swann et al. (1987), it is possible that in the current research, respondents' answers to the wanting to help scale which likely evoked their slow and analytic mode of thinking, had dampened the feelings of positive surprise and excitement that are often provoked when expectations are exceeded. This view seems to be corroborated by how respondents answered the exceeding expectations scale. As detailed in Table 5.11, point number three on the scale with the label "as I expected" was the most frequent answer across the three datasets. The second and third most frequent answers on the exceeding expectations scale were respectively points four and five.

*Table 5.11 Summary of respondents' answers to the exceeding expectations scale across the three consumption conditions*

Scale point	Hedonic		Utilitarian		Utilidonic	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Much less than I expected, but still acceptable	6	.50%	11	1.00%	6	.50%
Less than I expected, but still acceptable	32	2.60%	52	4.20%	42	3.40%
As I expected	569	46.50%	564	46.10%	509	41.60%
Better than I expected	408	33.30%	392	32.00%	433	35.40%
Much better than I expected	209	17.10%	205	16.70%	234	19.10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1224</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1224</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1224</b>	<b>100%</b>

In short, the data suffers from a few undesirable characteristics such as the presence of outliers, non-normality, and seemingly being influenced by response bias. These undesirable characteristics need to be remedied, if possible, prior to conducting any statistical techniques to test the proposed hypotheses. Such remedies and hypothesis testing are the subjects of the next section.

## 5.4 Hypothesis testing

In order to remedy the problematic characteristics of the data, three separate solutions were pursued. In each one of these solutions, hypotheses were tested using regression analyses and Fisher's r-to-z transformation test. In other words, the six hypotheses proposed

in the previous chapter were tested three different times under three different solutions. The first solution involves the exclusion of outliers and extreme scores from the WOM variable; the second involves data transformation; and the third involves standardisation of the scores. The following subsections describe these remedies and present the results of testing the proposed hypotheses after applying those remedies.

#### **5.4.1 Exclusion of WOM outliers**

The first remedy is the exclusion of data points from the WOM variable that are considered outliers or extreme. This was accomplished through the use of the boxplot of the distribution of the WOM scores. The boxplot is a graphical depiction of a variable's distribution and is based on the outliers labelling rule introduced by Tukey (1977). A box is displayed in the middle of this depiction which represents fifty per cent of the variable's scores. This fifty per cent contains the scores between the twenty fifth and the seventy-fifth percentiles of the data. Protruding out of this box and in opposite directions are two straight lines; these two lines represent the smallest and largest scores outside the fifty per cent in the middle. Data points that are 1.5 box-lengths away from the fifty per cent box are designated as outliers; and data points that are located three box-lengths away are considered very extreme (Pallant, 2011). WOM dissemination scores that extended more than 1.5 box-lengths were excluded from the dataset until the difference between the mean score of WOM dissemination and the trimmed mean was less than one.

Upon applying this solution, the number of cases in the WOM dissemination was reduced to three hundred and sixty-one in the hedonic dataset, to three hundred and seventy-six in the utilitarian dataset, and to three hundred and sixty-three in the utilidonic dataset. These sample sizes are still sufficient for regression analysis according to the recommendations cited earlier. The difference between the mean score and the five per cent trimmed mean was reduced to 0.81 in the hedonic dataset, to 0.80 in the utilidonic dataset, and to 0.74 in the utilitarian dataset. Moreover, the difference between the median and the mean was substantially reduced across the three datasets compared to what it was before outliers were excluded. Table 5.12 gives a description of the data after applying this remedy.

Table 5.12 Descriptive statistics after applying the first solution

	WOM - Hedonic	WOM - Utilitarian	WOM - Utilidonic
<b>Cases</b>	361	376	363
<b>Minimum</b>	1.00	1.00	1.00
<b>Maximum</b>	43.00	32.00	34.00
<b>Range</b>	42.00	31.00	33.00
<b>Mode</b>	4.00	4.00	4.00
<b>Median</b>	8.00	4.00	6.00
<b>Mean</b>	11.86	7.03	8.87
<b>Standard deviation</b>	9.85	6.69	8.13
<b>Variance</b>	97.07	44.88	66.19
<b>5% trimmed mean</b>	11.05	6.29	8.06
<b>Kolmogorov-Smirnov</b>	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Skewness</b>	1.16	1.62	1.40
<b>Kurtosis</b>	0.57	2.29	1.24
<b>Skewness z value</b>	9.00	12.89	10.90
<b>Kurtosis z value</b>	2.22	9.06	4.83

It can be inferred from Table 5.12 that the normality assumption is still not fully satisfied; however, it is certainly improved. This slight improvement can be seen in the histograms and normal probability plots provided in Appendices D-1 to D-3. Despite the violation of the normality assumption, a decision was made to proceed with regression analysis using these non-normal raw scores. This decision was directed mainly by the view that a slight non-normality in the data can be overlooked when the sample size reaches two hundred or more (Hair et al., 2006). Additionally, using the raw scores in the regression analysis would provide an initial measure of the ability of the two concepts to predict the outcome before transforming or standardising the data.

Hypothesis One posited that the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM can be predicted collectively by two variables; exceeding expectations and wanting to help. To empirically test this hypothesis, scores of the outcome variable from all the three datasets of hedonic, utilitarian, and utilidonic types of consumption were pooled to

represent one WOM dissemination variable. Given the number of outliers excluded earlier, this created a total of one thousand and one hundred cases. The same pooling arrangement was made with each of the two independent variables. Subsequently, multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis.

Prior to that however, preliminary analyses were conducted to check the assumptions of no multicollinearity, linearity and homoscedasticity. A correlation matrix of the analysed variables in this pooled dataset shows a bivariate correlation of 0.35 between the two independent variables. This is less than the cut-off point of 0.90 specified by Hair et al. (2006), and is less than the cut-off point of 0.70 noted by Pallant (2011). This is a first indication of support for the assumption of no multicollinearity. The assumption of no multicollinearity was further supported by the measures of tolerance and the variance inflation factor (VIF). Tolerance is a measure of how much of the variability of one predictor is not explained by the other predictor (Pallant, 2011). This value was 0.87, which is above the minimum threshold of 0.10. The VIF is the opposite of the tolerance measure. In the pooled dataset, this value was 1.14, which is below the maximum threshold of ten. Accordingly, no multicollinearity was detected between the independent variables.

The assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity can be examined by looking at the scatter plot of the regression standardised residuals which is provided in Appendix D-4. The plot shows the residuals concentrated around the zero point; this indicates that the two assumptions were met. However, the residuals seemed to form a slight negative trend; this constituted a mild violation of the two assumptions. Nevertheless, while mild violations of some of the regression assumptions are acknowledged here, a regression analysis was applied because multiple regression, as argued by Pardoe (2012), is reasonably resistant to mild violations of those assumptions.

Results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that exceeding expectations and wanting to help explained a small amount of variance in the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM ( $F(2, 1097) = 50.65, p < 0.00, R^2 = 0.085$ ). This judgement is based on the cut-off point suggested by Cohen (1988) in regard to the explanatory power of regression models. The author viewed coefficients of determination in multiple regressions that are between 0.02 and 0.14 as small, those between 0.15 and 0.34 as medium, and those above 0.34 as large. Thus, in the pooled dataset of raw scores, Hypothesis One was weakly

supported. Information about the contribution of each predictor to the variation in the outcome is not reported here because it is irrelevant to Hypothesis One.

Hypothesis Two postulated that in a condition of high hedonic consumption, exceeding expectations will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than wanting to help. To empirically test this hypothesis, hierarchical multiple regression was applied on the hedonic dataset. This procedure assesses the ability of each of the two predictors to predict the outcome while controlling for the other predictor. Preliminary analyses were carried out to examine the three regression assumptions noted previously. The bivariate correlation between the two independent variables was 0.28, which is below the cut-off point of 0.70. Additionally, the tolerance and VIF measures were 0.92 and 1.08 respectively. Thus, the assumption of no multicollinearity was satisfied. However, the scatter plot provided in AppendixD-5 points to a mild violation of the linearity and homoscedasticity assumptions. As cited earlier, mild violations of these assumption should not prevent the utilisation of hierarchical regression analysis.

In this hierarchical regression, the two predictors were entered into the regression in two orders. In the first order, wanting to help was entered first at step one, and thus controlling for its effect; and exceeding expectations was entered second at step two. The second order is the reverse; exceeding expectations was entered first at step one, and thus controlling for its effect; and wanting to help was entered second at step two. In both orders, the model as a whole explained a small amount of variance in the outcome variable. Nevertheless, the explanatory power of the model was not the focus of Hypothesis Two. Rather, the hypothesis was about the relative predictive strength of each of the two independent variables in comparison with each other. Provided that the coefficient of determination and the independent variables are significant, the relative predictive strength of each independent variable can still represent useful information regardless of how low the  $R^2$  is.

When wanting to help was entered first, 6.00% of the variance in WOM dissemination was explained. After entering exceeding expectations at step two, the total variance in WOM dissemination that was explained by both predictors combined was 9.40% ( $F(2, 358) = 18.57, p < 0.00$ ). Exceeding expectations therefore explained 3.40% of the variance in WOM dissemination after controlling for wanting to help ( $F \text{ change}(1, 358) = 13.511, p < 0.00$ ). When exceeding expectations was entered first at step one, and wanting to help was

entered at step two, the total variance explained by the whole model was the same and significant. The variance in the outcome variable that was explained by exceeding expectations was 6.10%, which is only one tenth of a decimal higher than the amount of variance explained when wanting to help was controlled for. This was deemed a negligible difference; and hence, it can be inferred that each of the two predictors has an equal predictive power. This parity was also reflected in the two predictors' significant Beta coefficients (exceeding expectations Beta = 0.19,  $p < 0.00$ ; wanting to help Beta = 0.19,  $p < 0.00$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis Two was not supported.

Hypothesis Three maintained that in a condition of high utilitarian consumption, wanting to help will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than exceeding expectations. Similar to the procedure applied in the hedonic dataset, hierarchical multiple regression was applied on the utilitarian dataset to test this hypothesis. The bivariate correlation between the two predictors was 0.35. Additionally, the tolerance and the VIF measures were 0.88 and 1.13 respectively. The assumption of no multicollinearity therefore has been met. Similar to the situation encountered in the hedonic dataset, the utilitarian dataset also appears to be slightly violating the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity. However, as the scatter plot in AppendixD-6 shows, this violation is mild.

In this hierarchical regression, when exceeding expectations was entered first at step one, 7.40% of the variance of WOM dissemination was explained. After entering wanting to help at step two, the combined effect of both predictors was 12.00% ( $F(2, 373) = 24.98$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ). Therefore, wanting to help explained 4.50% of the variance in the outcome variable after controlling for exceeding expectations ( $F \text{ change}(1, 373) = 18.825$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ). When the order was reversed by entering wanting to help first, a significant 8.50% of the variance in WOM dissemination was explained at step one. The remaining 3.50% of the variance was explained by exceeding expectations after it was entered second ( $F \text{ change}(1, 373) = 13.918$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ). The 8.50 % explanatory power of wanting to help is higher than the 7.40% of exceeding expectations by 1.10%. This difference was also reflected in the two predictors' significant Beta coefficients (wanting to help Beta = 0.23,  $p < 0.00$ ; exceeding expectations Beta = 0.19,  $p < 0.00$ ). Therefore, it can be inferred that Hypothesis Three was supported.

Hypothesis Four proposed that in a condition of high utilitarian consumption, exceeding expectations will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than wanting to help. To test this hypothesis, hierarchical regression was applied to the utilitarian dataset. The assumption of no multicollinearity seemed to be satisfactorily met as the correlation between the two independent variables and the tolerance and VIF measures were 0.41, 0.83, and 1.20 respectively. The scatter plot of the regression standardised residuals provided in AppendixD-7 showed a slight violation of the other two regression assumptions; the severity of which did not seem excessive, and therefore it was overlooked. At step one of the regression, wanting to help was entered first. This step explained 4.70% of the variance in the outcome variable. Exceeding expectations was entered at step two, whereupon the model as a whole explained 6.80% of the variance in WOM dissemination ( $F(2, 360) = 13.054, p < 0.00$ ). Thus, the explanatory power of exceeding expectations was 2.10% when controlling for wanting to help ( $F \text{ change}(1, 360) = 7.903, p < 0.00$ ). When the order was reversed and exceeding expectations was entered first, only 4.80% of the variance was explained, and the remaining two per cent was explained by wanting to help ( $F \text{ change}(1, 360) = 7.486, p = 0.00$ ). The difference between the two predictors in explaining the outcome variable seemed to be negligible. The two predictors also had a similar Beta coefficient ( $\text{Beta} = .15, p < .00$ ). Thus, Hypothesis Four was not supported.

Hypothesis Five posited that the positive relationship between exceeding expectations and WOM dissemination will be (a) strongest in the hedonic condition, (b) weakest in the utilitarian condition, and (c) in between in the utilitarian condition. This hypothesis was empirically tested by utilising the Fisher's r-to-z transformation technique. This technique tests whether two coefficients that are obtained from two independent samples are equal (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). In other words, it assesses the significance of the difference between two coefficients that come from two independent samples. This is computed by first converting each of the two coefficients into a z-score according to Fisher's r-to-z transformation table; and then the z-score is divided into one:

$$\frac{1}{\sqrt{N-3}}$$

If the difference between the two results is zero, then there is no difference between the two coefficients. If the difference between the two results is positive, then the first



coefficient is stronger than the second, and it is vice versa if the difference is negative. The Beta coefficients obtained from the hierarchical regressions reported above were used in this test. The test produced no significant difference between the Beta coefficient that measured the relationship between exceeding expectations and WOM dissemination in the hedonic condition and the Beta coefficient that measured the same relationship in the utilitarian condition ( $z = 0.00$ ,  $p < 0.50$ ). Also, no significant results were obtained when comparing each of the Beta coefficients in the hedonic and utilitarian conditions to their counterpart in the utilidonic condition ( $z = 0.50$ ,  $p < 0.30$ ). Thus, Hypothesis Five was not supported.

Hypothesis Six asserted that the positive relationship between wanting to help and WOM dissemination will be (a) strongest in the utilitarian condition, (b) weakest in the hedonic condition, and (c) in between in the utilidonic condition. Using the Fisher test to compare the Beta coefficients of this relationship across the three conditions did not return a significant difference between the utilitarian and hedonic conditions ( $z = 0.49$ ,  $p < 0.31$ ), nor between the utilitarian and utilidonic conditions ( $z = 1.01$ ,  $p < 0.15$ ), nor between the hedonic and utilidonic conditions ( $z = 0.51$ ,  $p < 0.30$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis Six was not supported.

#### **5.4.2 Transforming the data**

Another remedy that can ameliorate the data's violations of regression assumptions is data transformation. Data transformation is a technique which changes the measurement units of a variable (Cohen et al., 2003) in order to eliminate or alleviate the undesirable characteristics in the data (Hair et al., 2006). In general, data transformation is employed to improve the normality of variables, to improve the homoscedasticity in the data, and to simplify relationships by making them more linear (Cohen et al., 2003). This solution seems to be particularly needed in the circumstance of the data at hand in which violations of regression assumptions were detected. Some of these violations were severe such as the non-normality in the variable of WOM dissemination. Some were mild such as the non-normality in the wanting to help variable and the slight heteroscedasticity and non-linearity between the independent and dependent variables. Data transformation can be utilised to possibly rectify or alleviate these violations.

Furthermore, data transformation is resorted to here because the initial steps of screening the data fell short of fully adhering to regression assumptions. This was evidently the case

when the first remedy of excluding outliers was applied. Following the exclusion of outliers from the variable of WOM dissemination, slight improvement occurred in terms of meeting the assumptions; however, violations of the assumptions were not fully eliminated.

Moreover, other circumstances have been pinpointed in the literature for which data transformation has been suggested as a possible remedy. Hair et al. (2006), for example, recommend data transformation especially for distributions that are highly skewed.

Tabachnic and Fidell (2007) view data transformation as particularly useful when the extremity of skewness varies from variable to variable. They further consider data transformation an appropriate procedure if the data is measured by a scale that has not been used widely in previous studies.

Additionally, Cohen et al. (2003) deem data transformation as a suitable remedy for assumption violations when the dependent variable has a large range. The authors also argue that some variables are inherently susceptible to non-linearity. That is, they are likely to have non-linear relationships with other variables. As an example of these, the authors suggested variables that are based on counts of the number of events that occurred in a particular time period. Scores of such variables are likely to be positively skewed especially if the events occurred rarely. Transformation therefore is needed to linearise the relationships these variables have with other variables (Cohen et al., 2003). Almost all the circumstances cited above that call for data transformation seem to be present in the data collected in the current research. Consequently, transformation seems to be a valid course to take before proceeding to the testing of hypotheses.

Transformation of data in the current research was implemented as follows. It was applied to both independent and dependent variables as suggested by Hair et al. (2006). The choice of the specific transformation method for each variable was based on the shape of that variable's distribution as suggested by Tabachnic and Fidell (2007) and Pallant (2011). After transformation, outliers in the transformed data were checked using Tukey's rule. Lastly, transformed data was retained if the skewness and kurtosis values improved. However, if transformation had a substantial opposite effect, and there is no compelling reason for using the transformed scores, the original untransformed data was retained.

To test Hypothesis One, the raw scores of WOM dissemination across the three types of consumption were pooled to create a single variable that comprised one thousand two

hundred and twenty four cases. The distribution of this pooled variable had skewness and kurtosis values of 5.74 and 41.34 respectively. Based on the shape of this pooled variable's distribution, logarithm transformation was applied. Subsequently, Tukey's outlier labelling rule was applied, and as a result, twelve cases were identified as outliers and therefore excluded. This reduced the number of cases available for analysis to one thousand two hundred and twelve. The skewness and kurtosis values of this transformed variable were 0.28 and -0.24 respectively. These two values constituted a considerable improvement as they are closer to zero. Thus, the transformed variable of WOM dissemination was retained and used in subsequent analyses. Similar steps were made to transform the predictor variables using transformation methods that corresponded to the shape of their respective distributions. However, no improvement was observed in terms of meeting regression assumptions; and no defence was envisaged as to why the transformed scores should still be used. Therefore, the original untransformed scores of the two predictor variables were retained and used in the following regression analysis.

Prior to applying multiple regression in the testing of Hypothesis One, an examination of the data's compliance with regression assumptions revealed absence of multicollinearity with an acceptable 0.35 correlation between the two independent variables of wanting to help and exceeding expectations. Tolerance and VIF measures were also acceptable (tolerance = 0.87; VIF = 1.13). The scatterplot of regression standardised residuals which is provided in AppendixE-1 appears to show a mild and dismissible violation of the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity. After regressing the transformed pooled scores of WOM dissemination against the pooled raw scores of wanting to help and exceeding expectations, results show that the two predictors explained 17.00% of the variance in the outcome variable ( $F(2,1209) = 120.57, p < 0.00$ ). Therefore, after data transformation, Hypothesis One was moderately supported.

Prior to testing Hypothesis Two, three variables from the hedonic dataset were transformed. These were WOM dissemination which is the dependent variable and wanting to help and exceeding expectations which are the independent variables. WOM dissemination was transformed using the inverse method of transformation. After applying the Tukey's rule, forty-two of the transformed scores were identified as outliers and therefore excluded from the WOM dissemination variable. This left three hundred sixty-six cases available for analysis. The skewness and kurtosis values of this transformed variable were 0.90 and -0.09

respectively, which is a substantial improvement from what they were before transformation. For the two predictor variables, both of which had a slight negative skewness, reflected square root transformation was applied, and no outliers were identified. While the distribution of wanting to help improved (skewness = 0.12; kurtosis = 0.02), the distribution of exceeding expectations did not (skewness = -0.61; kurtosis = 0.16). However, the changes in the skewness and kurtosis values of the exceeding expectations variable were minimal and negligible. Additionally, because Hypothesis Two compares two variables in terms of their predictive power, it is reasoned here that applying the same transformation method to both predictors would facilitate this comparison. As a result, the transformed scores of both predictors were retained and used in the subsequent hierarchical regression analysis.

The assumption of no multicollinearity seemed to be satisfied as evident in the 0.24 correlation between the two predictors and in the tolerance and VIF values of 0.94 and 1.06. A modest violation of the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity could be noticed from the scatter plot of the regression standardised residuals in AppendixE-2. However, this mild violation can be overlooked. When the predictor variable of wanting to help was entered at step one, 5.40% of the variance in the outcome variable of WOM dissemination was explained. After entering the predictor variable of exceeding expectations at step two, the variance explained by the entire model was 8.70% ( $F(2, 335) = 15.967, p < 0.00$ ). Therefore, exceeding expectations explained 3.30% of the variance after controlling for wanting to help ( $F \text{ change}(1, 335) = 12.060, p = 0.00$ ). When the order was shifted, no difference was found; the variable of exceeding expectations explained 5.40% of the variance at step one, and the entire model explained 8.70% of the variance when wanting to help was entered at step two. In both orders, both predictors had the same Beta coefficient ( $\text{Beta} = 0.18, p < 0.00$ ). Thus, after data transformation, Hypothesis Two was not supported.

Transformations that are similar to those applied to the hedonic dataset were also applied to the utilitarian dataset. The variable of WOM dissemination was transformed using the inverse method. After using the Tukey's rule, the number of cases in the WOM dissemination variable was reduced to three hundred fifty-three. The two predictor variables of wanting to help and exceeding expectations were transformed using the reflected square root method, in which no outliers were identified. The values of skewness and kurtosis in the transformed WOM dissemination variable were 0.77 and -0.44 respectively. The skewness

and kurtosis values in the transformed wanting to help were 0.04 and -0.11. In the transformed variable of exceeding expectations, these two values were -0.52 and 0.10 respectively. After conducting the hierarchical regression with these variables, a correlation of 0.25 between the two independent variables was obtained. The multicollinearity statistics of tolerance and VIF were 0.93 and 1.06 respectively. Thus, the assumption of no multicollinearity was satisfied. A mild violation of the other two assumptions could be deduced from the scatter plot provided in AppendixE-3. Nevertheless, similar to the judgements made in the previous regression analyses, this modest violation was overlooked.

At step one of the hierarchical regression, exceeding expectations was entered first, explaining 5.00% of the variance in the dissemination of WOM. When wanting to help was added to the regression model at step two, the total explained variance increased to 12.40% ( $F(2,322) = 22.71, p < 0.00$ ). Thus, 7.40% of the variance in WOM dissemination was explained by wanting to help after controlling for exceeding expectations ( $F \text{ change}(1, 322) = 27.199, p < 0.00$ ). When the order of entering the predictor variables was changed, wanting to help explained 10.20% of the variance in the outcome variable at step one. The remaining 2.20% of the variance was explained when exceeding expectations was added at step two ( $F \text{ change}(1, 322) = 8.054, p = 0.00$ ). These results, which indicate predictive salience of wanting to help, were also reflected in the Beta coefficients of both predictors (wanting to help Beta = 0.28,  $p < 0.00$ ; exceeding expectations Beta = 0.15,  $p < 0.00$ ). Thus, after data transformation, Hypothesis Three was supported.

In the utilitarian dataset, inverse transformation was applied to the variable of WOM dissemination. This resulted in a skewness value of 1.01 and a kurtosis value of 0.07. The two predictor variables were transformed using the reflected square root method. The transformed variable of wanting to help had a skewness value of 0.14, and a kurtosis value of -0.06. In the transformed variable of exceeding expectations, these two values were -0.38 and -0.05. In terms of the three regression assumptions, this dataset exhibited a trend similar to those exhibited by the hedonic and utilitarian datasets. That is compliance with the assumption of no multicollinearity and a mild and dismissible violation of the linearity and homoscedasticity assumptions. This was deduced from the 0.30 correlation between the two independent variables, from the respective statistics of tolerance and VIF of 0.90 and 1.10, and from the scatter plot provided in AppendixE-4.

To test Hypothesis Four, the transformed scores of WOM dissemination were hierarchically regressed against the transformed scores of the two independent variables of wanting to help and exceeding expectations. At step one, wanting to help was entered first; thus, controlling for its effect. This explained 6.80% of the variance in WOM dissemination. At step two, exceeding expectations was added, and the model as a whole explained 10.30% of the variance ( $F(2, 342) = 19.731, p < 0.00$ ). Hence, exceeding expectations explained only 3.50% of the variance in WOM dissemination while controlling for wanting to help ( $F \text{ change}(1, 342) = 13.406, p < 0.00$ ). Subsequently, the order by which the two predictors were entered was switched by entering exceeding expectations first. The variance in the dependent variable that was explained by this predictor was 6.70%. The remaining 3.70% of the variance was explained by wanting to help after it was entered at step two ( $F \text{ change}(1, 342) = 13.978, p < 0.00$ ). Thus, the  $R^2$  changes affected by each predictor are roughly the same. The Beta coefficients of the two predictors were also the same ( $\text{Beta} = 0.20, p < 0.00$ ). Therefore, after data transformation, Hypothesis Four was not supported.

Fisher's *r*-to-*z* transformation technique was used to test Hypotheses Five and Six. When the Beta coefficients of the relationship between exceeding expectations and WOM dissemination across the hedonic and utilitarian conditions were compared, no significant difference was found ( $z = 0.45, p = 0.32$ ). Similarly, no significant difference was found between the coefficients in the hedonic and utilitarian conditions ( $z = -0.13, p = 0.44$ ), nor between the coefficients in the utilitarian and utilitarian conditions ( $z = -0.58, p = 0.28$ ). Based on these results, Hypothesis Five was not supported after data transformation. When comparing the Beta coefficients of the relationship between wanting to help and WOM dissemination across the utilitarian and hedonic conditions, no significant difference was found ( $z = 1.27, p = 0.10$ ). Similarly, no significant difference was found between the coefficients in the utilitarian and utilitarian conditions ( $z = 1.09, p = 0.13$ ), nor between the coefficients in the hedonic and utilitarian conditions ( $z = -0.19, p = 0.42$ ). Thus, after data transformation, Hypothesis Six was not supported.

### **5.4.3 Standardisation of scores**

The third and last remedy applied to the data is standardisation of the raw scores. Standardisation of scores refers to the adjustment of scores in relation to other elements in the dataset (Fischer, 2004; Fischer & Milfont, 2010). This is different from typical methods of

transformation where the adjustment of scores is applied independent of other elements in the dataset. The use of standardised scores has been advocated in previous research as a means to correct for biases in collected data (Fischer, 2004; Fischer & Milfont, 2010). These include the different forms of response bias which were described earlier. Furthermore, the use of standardised scores does not preclude the utilisation of statistical techniques such as regression (Fischer, 2004).

In the current research, two approaches of standardisation were applied. The first was a standardisation of the WOM dissemination index scores in relation to the three conditions of hedonic, utilitarian, and utilidonic consumption. In other words, a standardised WOM dissemination index score in one consumption type was standardised in relation to the WOM dissemination index scores in all three types of consumption. This form of standardisation can be called across-condition standardisation, and it was calculated using the following formula:

*standardised WOM<sub>x consumption</sub>* =

$$\frac{WOM_{x\ consumption} - \text{mean of } (WOM_{hedonic}, WOM_{utilitarian}, WOM_{utilidonic})}{\text{standard deviation of } (WOM_{hedonic}, WOM_{utilitarian}, WOM_{utilidonic})}$$

The second approach of standardisation was applied to the individual items within the two predictor variables of wanting to help and exceeding expectations. It was a standardisation of individual scale items in relation to the other items of the same scale within one consumption condition. For example, a standardised score of item number one of the wanting to help variable in the hedonic dataset was standardised in relation to all six wanting-to-help items in the hedonic dataset. This form of standardisation can be called within-condition standardisation. In the case of the wanting-to-help variable, this standardisation was calculated as follows:

*standardised item x<sub>x consumption</sub>* =

$$\frac{\text{item } x_{x\ consumption} - \text{mean of } (item1, item2, item3, item4, item5, item6)_{x\ consumption}}{\text{standard deviation of } (item1, item2, item3, item4, item5, item6)_{x\ consumption}}$$

In the case of the exceeding expectations variable, the within-condition standardisation was calculated as follows:

*standardised item  $x_{x \text{ consumption}}$*  =

$$\frac{\text{item } x_{x \text{ consumption}} - \text{mean of } (item1, item2, item3, item4, item5)_{x \text{ consumption}}}{\text{standard deviation of } (item1, item2, item3, item4, item5)_{x \text{ consumption}}}$$

After the standardisation of the individual items, an index score was calculated by adding the transformed scores.

Implementing two different approaches of standardisation to different variables was mainly based on the scaling used in the measurement of these variables. In the measurement of WOM dissemination, a ratio scale was used; respondents were first asked how many times they generated WOM messages, and they were required to answer with a number. Subsequent questions in the WOM dissemination scale, which focused on WOM characteristics such as strength, advocacy, and details, were meant to produce answers that are dependent on the answer respondents gave to the first question. Therefore, standardising the score of the first WOM item in relation to all the items in the scale (i.e. within-condition standardisation) was not theoretically tenable. As a result, standardising the WOM index score across conditions stood as a viable and theoretically justifiable approach. This approach would adjust for extreme responses bias, and it would also adjust for any dispositional tendencies toward generating WOM which some respondents might potentially have.

On the other hand, the different type of scaling used in the measurement of the two predictor variables warranted a different standardisation approach (i.e., within-condition). Because each of the predictor variables was measured on an ordinal scale, it was befitting to standardise every individual scale item in relation to all the items in the scale. Additionally, standardising the individual items in relation to all the items in the scale would help adjust for the different forms of response biases that are suspected to have influenced the quality of the data. Table 5.13 contains the values of skewness and kurtosis of the standardised variables in the three datasets. These figures indicate acceptable levels of normality across all variables as they are close to zero.



Table 5.13 Descriptive statistics of standardised variables across the three datasets

Dataset	Variable	Cases	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Skewness	Kurtosis
Hedonic					
	WOM	272	0.00	-0.32	-1.19
	Wanting to help	116	0.20	0.03	-0.85
	Exceeding expectations	181	0.00	0.03	-1.13
Utilitarian					
	WOM	272	0.00	0.97	-0.25
	Wanting to help	116	0.00	0.09	-1.10
	Exceeding expectations	181	0.00	0.14	-1.23
Utilidonic					
	WOM	272	0.00	0.29	-1.16
	Wanting to help	116	0.20	-0.09	-0.78
	Exceeding expectations	181	0.00	-0.04	-0.99

After standardising the data, the six proposed hypotheses were tested starting with Hypothesis One. Similar to the arrangement made in the first two solutions, a pooled variable was created that was made up of standardised scores of WOM dissemination in all three types of consumption. Also, the same arrangement was repeated in the creation of two pooled variables that contained the standardised scores of wanting to help and exceeding expectations across the three types of consumption. To test Hypothesis One, the standardised scores from the pooled variable of WOM dissemination were regressed against those from the pooled variables of wanting to help and exceeding expectations in a multiple regression analysis. No multicollinearity was detected between the two independent variables ( $r = 0.51$ ; tolerance = 0.74; VIF = 1.35). Further, the scatter plot of the regression standardised residuals, which is provided in Appendix F-1, shows the absence of a clear pattern and a concentration of the scores around the zero point. Thus, the three assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity appear to be met; this is a favourable improvement from the previous regression analyses conducted thus far. Results of the multiple regression showed that the two predictors explained a considerable amount of variance in the outcome variable of WOM dissemination ( $R^2 = 0.28$ ;  $F(2, 171) = 33.29$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ). Therefore, after standardising the scores, Hypothesis One was moderately supported.

In the testing of Hypothesis Two, the hedonic dataset was used in a hierarchical regression analysis to make a comparison between exceeding expectations and wanting to help in terms of the ability of each variable to predict WOM dissemination. As indicated by multicollinearity statistics and the scatter plot in AppendixF-2, no violation of the three regression assumptions was detected ( $r$  between the two predictors = 0.35; tolerance = 0.87; VIF = 1.14). When wanting to help was entered first, 13.80% of the variance in WOM dissemination was explained. After including the predictor of exceeding expectations, the total variance explained by the model amounted to 23.60% ( $F(2, 55) = 8.49, p < 0.00$ ). Thus, when the effect of wanting to help was controlled for, exceeding expectations explained 9.80% of the variance in WOM dissemination in a hedonic consumption ( $F$  change  $(1, 55) = 7.059, p = 0.01$ ). However, when the order of entering the predictors was changed, exceeding expectations explained 18.10% of the variance at step one; and at step two, the entire model explained 23.60%. Hence, when the effect of exceeding expectations was controlled for, the ability of wanting to help to explain the outcome variable in a hedonic consumption dropped to 5.50% ( $F$  change  $(1, 55) = 3.976, p = 0.05$ ). This relative strength of exceeding expectations in predicting WOM dissemination in hedonic consumption was also evident in the two predictors' Beta coefficients (exceeding expectations Beta = 0.33,  $p = 0.01$ ; wanting to help Beta = 0.25,  $p = 0.05$ ). Therefore, after standardisation of the scores, Hypothesis Two was supported.

In the testing of Hypothesis Three, the utilitarian dataset was used. As indicated by multicollinearity statistics and the scatter plot which is provided in AppendixF-3, no violation of the three regression assumptions was detected ( $r$  between the two predictors = 0.56; tolerance = 0.68; VIF = 1.46). At step one of the regression analysis, exceeding expectations was entered first; this explained 26.40% of the variance in the outcome variable. When wanting to help was entered at step two, the model as a whole explained 38.50% of the variance ( $F(2, 55) = 17.21, p < 0.00$ ). Therefore, after controlling for exceeding expectations, wanting to help explained 12.00% of the variance in WOM dissemination in a utilitarian consumption situation ( $F$  change  $(1, 55) = 10.817, p = 0.00$ ). When the variable of wanting to help was entered first at step one, 33.30% of the variance in WOM dissemination was explained, and the remaining 5.20% was explained by exceeding expectations ( $F$  change  $(1, 55) = 4.673, p = 0.03$ ). Additionally, the Beta coefficients reflected this predictive salience of wanting to help in the utilitarian condition (wanting to help Beta = 0.42,  $p < 0.00$ ; exceeding

expectations  $\text{Beta} = 0.27$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ). Thus, after standardisation of the scores, Hypothesis Three was supported.

Hypothesis Four posited that in utilitarian consumption, the variable of exceeding expectations will be a stronger predictor of WOM dissemination than wanting to help. Preliminary analyses of the utilitarian dataset showed conformance to the three regression assumptions ( $r$  between the two predictors = 0.58; tolerance = 0.66; VIF = 1.51; also the scatter plot in Appendix F-4). At step one of the hierarchical regression, wanting to help was entered first. The variance in the outcome variable that was explained at step one was 24.00%. When exceeding expectations was entered at step two, the model as a whole explained 27.00% of the variance ( $F(2, 55) = 10.27$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ). Hence, after controlling for wanting to help, exceeding expectations explained a non-significant 3.30% of the variance in WOM dissemination ( $F \text{ change}(1, 55) = 2.520$ ,  $p = 0.11$ ). Subsequently, the order of entering the predictors into the analysis was reversed. At step one, exceeding expectations was entered first; this explained 18.70% of the variance in the outcome variable. The remaining 8.50% of the variance was explained by wanting to help which was entered at step two ( $F \text{ change}(1, 55) = 6.419$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). Thus, wanting to help was more salient in predicting WOM dissemination than exceeding expectations. This result was also reflected in the two predictors' Beta coefficients (wanting to help  $\text{Beta} = 0.36$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ; exceeding expectations  $\text{Beta} = 0.22$ ,  $p = 0.11$ ). Therefore, after standardisation of the scores, Hypothesis Four was not supported.

When comparing the Beta coefficients of the relationship between exceeding expectations and WOM dissemination across the hedonic and utilitarian conditions, Fisher's  $r$ -to- $z$  transformation technique did not yield a significant result ( $z = 0.33$ ,  $p = 0.37$ ). Likewise, no significant result was found when the comparison was made between the coefficients in the hedonic and utilitarian conditions ( $z = 0.63$ ,  $p = 0.26$ ), nor between the coefficients in the utilitarian and utilitarian conditions ( $z = 0.29$ ,  $p = 0.38$ ). Consequently, after standardisation of the scores, Hypothesis Five was not supported. Similar comparisons were conducted between the Beta coefficients of the relationship between wanting to help and WOM dissemination across the three consumption conditions. None of these tests returned significant results. Between the utilitarian and hedonic conditions, the  $z$  value was 0.99 ( $p = 0.16$ ); between the utilitarian and utilitarian conditions, the  $z$  value was 0.39 ( $p = 0.34$ ); and between the hedonic and utilitarian conditions, the  $z$  value was -0.61 ( $p = 0.27$ ). Thus, after

standardisation of the scores, Hypothesis Six was not supported. Table 5.14 summarises the results of the empirical testing of the six hypotheses across the three solutions.

*Table 5.14 Summary of the results*

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Solution 1: Exclusion of outliers</b>	<b>Solution 2: Transformation of data</b>	<b>Solution 3: Standardisation of scores</b>
1) The dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM can be predicted by exceeding expectations and wanting to help collectively.	weakly supported	moderately supported	moderately supported
2) In a condition of high hedonic consumption, exceeding expectations will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than wanting to help.	not supported	not supported	supported
3) In a condition of high utilitarian consumption, wanting to help will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than exceeding expectations.	supported	supported	supported
4) In a condition of high utilidonic consumption, exceeding expectations will be a stronger predictor of the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM than wanting to help.	not supported	not supported	not supported
5) The positive relationship between exceeding expectations and the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM will be <b>(a)</b> strongest in the hedonic condition, <b>(b)</b> weakest in the utilitarian condition, and <b>(c)</b> in between in the utilidonic condition.	not supported	not supported	not supported

6) The positive relationship between wanting to help and the dissemination of unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM will be <b>(a)</b> strongest in the utilitarian condition, <b>(b)</b> weakest in the hedonic condition, and <b>(c)</b> in between in the utilidonic condition.	not supported	not supported	not supported
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## 6 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the current research by, first, presenting an overall summary of the research problems and the arguments put forward to address them. Second, the chapter provides a discussion of the empirical results along with any limitations that might have had an influence on how the research was conducted or on the results. In the third and fourth sections respectively, theoretical and practical implications are suggested. Finally, possible future research opportunities are identified in Section Five.

### 6.1 Summary

The problem the current research addresses is how to predict and stimulate the consumers' behaviour of generating WOM messages. Different techniques and theoretical frameworks have been proposed to answer this question in both the professional and academic arenas. In the former, techniques such as viral marketing and the utilisation of brand pushers, influential consumers, or focus groups have been touted. In the latter arena, a number of theoretical frameworks have been proposed. Nevertheless, the difficulty of predicting and stimulating this behaviour persists. In an attempt to understand this problem, the current research proposes a new theoretical framework that has a refined conceptualisation of WOM, takes into account the effect of consumption types, is parsimonious and is applicable to both online and offline WOM.

In it, the phenomenon of WOM dissemination is viewed through the prism of three different categories, each of which has its own set of predictors. These three are unsolicited pre-consumption, unsolicited post-consumption, and solicited WOM. Based on a review of the WOM literature, twelve variables are each envisaged to play a role in explaining the behaviour of generating positive WOM. These roles are determined based on the situational or dispositional nature of the variable; situational variables are utilised as independent variables, whereas dispositional variables are utilised as either conditioning or moderating variables. In this context, innovativeness of advertisements and innovativeness of products are construed to be predictors of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM, exceeding expectations and wanting to help are construed to be predictors of unsolicited post-consumption WOM, and difficulty of evaluation is construed to be the predictor of solicited WOM.

Additionally, while a conditioning variable makes one independent variable stronger than another independent variable in predicting the dependent variable, a moderator affects the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Hair et al., 2006). The conditioning effect described above is based on the typological congruence between the conditioning variable and the salient predictor. This congruence is predicated on the typology of the experiential and analytical systems of thinking suggested by Kahneman (2011). In this context, innovativeness of product is construed to be the stronger predictor of unsolicited pre-consumption WOM in the conditions of enduring involvement, self-enhancement, and consumption-focused interpersonal relationships. However, salience in predicting unsolicited pre-consumption WOM shifts to innovativeness of advertisements in the condition of traditional interpersonal relationships.

Further, wanting to help is postulated to be the stronger predictor of unsolicited post-consumption WOM in the conditions of enduring involvement, self-enhancement, consumption-focused interpersonal relationships, and utilitarian consumption. Conversely, in the conditions of traditional interpersonal relationships, hedonic consumption, and utilitarian consumption, exceeding expectations is the more salient predictor. Furthermore, traditional interpersonal relationships and enduring involvement are proposed as positive moderators of the positive relationship between difficulty of evaluation and solicited WOM. Nevertheless, this positive relationship is moderated negatively by consumption-focused interpersonal relationships.

## **6.2 Discussion of the results and limitations**

As the initial theoretical framework was very large, with numerous concepts, empirical testing was constrained. The current project thus tackled only a proportion of the proposed theoretical framework; the prediction of generating unsolicited post-consumption WOM messages and how this prediction is affected when it is tested under three different types of consumption modalities (hedonic, utilitarian, and utilitarian). It was hypothesised that the outcome variable can be parsimoniously predicted by a set of two variables: exceeding expectations and wanting to help. Additionally, exceeding expectations was hypothesised to be the stronger predictor in the conditions of hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption, whereas wanting to help was hypothesised to be the stronger predictor in the condition of utilitarian consumption.

As shown in the results chapter, three different remedies were applied to make the collected data more suitable for regression analysis. Nevertheless, the strong positive skewness of the WOM dissemination scores appeared to have had a profound effect on the statistical tests. The number of hypotheses that were not supported, which exceeded the number of those that were supported, could be a result of this heavy skewness. It is also possible that the extremely non-normal distributions of those scores across the three datasets could simply be an actual reflection of WOM dissemination as a phenomenon. The distribution of the data collected by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) is supportive of this view. The authors obtained highly skewed scores after using a ratio scale to measure the number of comments consumers made on opinion platforms. However, others such as Alsulaiman (2013) used an ordinal rating scale to measure WOM dissemination with which normally distributed scores were obtained. Therefore, it is possible that the non-normality of the WOM dissemination scores in the current research was a result of the scaling approach used in the measurement of this variable.

A ratio scale such as the one used here would, in theory, result in more precision and more variation in the data, as it asks for a numerical value (Stangor, 2010). Alternatively, a rating scale such as the one used in Alsulaiman (2013) would, in theory, result in a lesser degree of precision and variation, and consequently in loss of information (Stangor, 2010). However, an argument could be made that in the measurement of WOM dissemination particularly, the use of a ratio scale could likely in some circumstances contribute to the occurrence of response bias and non-normality more so than a rating scale would. Being asked to rate the frequency at which respondents generated WOM using points that have qualitative descriptions is arguably more convenient and easier to remember than having to remember or estimate that frequency with a numerical value.

More specifically, providing respondents with qualitative scale points such as “never”, “often”, “occasionally”, “very often”, and “always” could expedite the process of data collection. This is particularly likely when the time span in which WOM occurred is too long and too far back to remember because the respondent in this situation is likely to be thinking in a holistic way. This is arguably not compatible with specific numerical values. On the contrary, trying to remember or estimate the specific number of the times in which a particular casual behaviour such as WOM dissemination had occurred in the past might require more effort. Hence, this might negatively affect the respondent’s willingness or



motivation to respond accurately. Therefore, a rating scale might be more suitable than a ratio scale for the measurement of WOM dissemination that occurred a long time ago. Furthermore, with the phenomenon of WOM dissemination belonging to the realm of social and behavioural sciences, an ordinal rating scale could be viewed as more applicable, as opposed to a ratio scale the use of which is prevalent in the physical and natural sciences (Stangor, 2010). Nonetheless, a ratio scale could be an optimal tool to measure WOM dissemination if the time span which correspondents are asked to recollect is short. Keller and Fay (2012) applied this approach by asking respondents to record their WOM dissemination behaviour in a daily log or diary. In this context, reporting on the frequency of WOM dissemination with a numerical value is likely to be more optimal and more accurate.

While time and budget constraints prevented the collection of new data, three different solutions were implemented to remedy the undesirable characteristics of the data collected. The advantage gained from applying these remedies was an improvement in the overall skewness and therefore in the normality of the scores for most of the analysed variables across the three datasets. This improvement was smallest following the implementation of the first remedy (i.e., approximation between the mean and trimmed mean scores), larger following transformation, and largest following standardisation. This pattern was also reflected in some of the empirical tests of the hypotheses. For example, the variance in WOM dissemination that was explained by exceeding expectations and wanting to help was small after the first remedy, increased after the second remedy, and increased further after the third remedy.

The two  $R^2$  values of 0.17 and 0.28 which were obtained after transformation and standardisation respectively seem comparable to previous multiple regression models in which WOM dissemination was the dependent variable. Yap et al. (2013) investigated the collective ability of five variables to predict the affective characteristics of WOM messages; the adjusted  $R^2$  for that regression model was 0.16. They also used the same five variables as regressors against the dependent variable of cognitive characteristics of WOM messages, and the adjusted  $R^2$  for their model was 0.36. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) found an  $R^2$  of 0.20 for a regression model that comprised four predictors of WOM dissemination in online platforms. Additionally, Bone (1992) reported a regression model of three regressors to predict WOM dissemination; the  $R^2$  and adjusted  $R^2$  for their model were .26 and .20 respectively.

The relative predictive power of each predictor within conditions also was larger for the three remedies, particularly for the standardisation remedy. In the hedonic and utilitonic conditions, the two predictors explained roughly equivalent amounts of variance in WOM dissemination when the first two remedies were applied. However, when standardised, there were differences between the two in terms of their predictive power. This divergence was as expected in the hedonic condition but against the hypothesis in the utilitonic condition. In the utilitarian condition, the difference between wanting to help and exceeding expectations in terms of their predictive power was considerable after the first solution and as hypothesised. These differences were larger still for the second and third remedies.

In addition to the foregoing advantages of implementing the three remedies, sizable reductions in the number of cases available for analysis was a disadvantage, with the first remedy affecting the smallest decrease (11.76%), the third affecting the biggest (86.02%), and the second remedy being in between (17.40%). While the reductions in the sample size following the two first remedies were mainly the result of the exclusion of outliers, the reduction of the sample following standardisation was inherently driven by the calculation of standardised scores. Part of this calculation was the computation of the standard deviation of a number of data points. In the case of across-condition standardisation, these data points were the WOM dissemination index scores in each of the three consumption types. In the case of within-condition standardisation, these data points were the scores of individual items within consumption conditions. When the values of these data points were equal, calculation of the standard deviation had to be zero. Hence, the SPSS software treated the cases that had a standard deviation of zero as containing missing values. Moreover, these artificial missing values occurred in different variables for different cases. With the option of pairwise exclusion chosen in SPSS, these cases had to be excluded from analysis. This also contributed to the substantial drop in the sample size. Nevertheless, none of the above-mentioned reductions were drastically below what is recommended in the literature in terms of the minimum sample size required for regression. The smallest sample size which was rendered by the standardisation remedy was in line with the recommendation of Stevens (1996), and it was only nine cases short of meeting the recommendation of Tabachnic and Fidell (2007).

Bearing in mind the different imperfections in the dataset and the remedies that were applied to rectify them, two main findings stood out as especially interesting. The first was

the ability of the two variables of exceeding expectations and wanting to help to collectively predict the behaviour of generating unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM. The second was the contradistinction between the hedonic and utilitarian conditions in terms of predicting unsolicited post-consumption positive WOM, especially after standardisation. As hypothesised, exceeding expectations was the stronger predictor of WOM dissemination in hedonic consumption, whereas wanting to help was the stronger predictor in utilitarian consumption. Theoretical and practical implications of these main findings will be expanded upon in Sections 6.3 and 6.4.

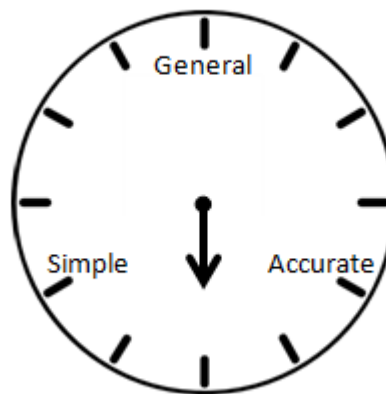
In regard to the predictive power of the two precursors of the utilitarian condition, the result was opposite to what was hypothesised; wanting to help was found to be stronger than exceeding expectations in predicting WOM dissemination. One possible explanation for this unexpected finding is in how the idea of a utilitarian product was communicated to respondents. Coining the label “utilitarian” to denote a product that has both hedonic and utilitarian attributes could potentially be biased toward the utilitarian side because the word “utilitarian” features in the first half of this new label. As a result, this might have put emphasis in respondents’ thinking on the utilitarian aspects of the product compared to its hedonic aspects. How different might the results have been had an alternative label (e.g., hedonitarian) been used instead of “utilitarian”? Therefore, there might be a need for a more neutral label to describe this hybrid type of products.

### **6.3 Theoretical implications**

One of the main contributions of the current research is a refined conceptualisation of WOM dissemination. Rather than following the general view of this phenomenon, the current research contextualised it by identifying three categories of WOM dissemination. This new perspective calls for higher levels of accuracy and yet simplicity in building the theoretical underpinnings of this phenomenon. Such a view, according to Thorngate (1976), would necessarily result in a theory of positive WOM dissemination that is less general. In his postulate of theoretical simplicity, the author contended that “it is impossible for an explanation of social behaviour to be simultaneously general, simple, and accurate” (p. 126). Generality here refers to the number of responses or behaviours that can be explained by a theory; simplicity refers to the number of variables that explain a social behaviour; and

accuracy denotes the level of rigour and precision in the conceptual and operational definitions of constructs and in the statistical methods used.

Demonstrating this postulate pictorially, Weick (1979) likened it to a clock face where the three characteristics of general, accurate, and simple are set respectively at numbers twelve, four, and eight. As shown in Figure 6.1, in order for a theoretical explanation to have proportionate levels of simplicity and accuracy, the clock hand would be pointed at number six. This trade-off means that a simple and accurate theory is least able to satisfy the third characteristic of generality. Similarly, it follows that a general and accurate theory is inherently complex, and that a simple and general theory has to be lacking in terms of accuracy.



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*Figure 6.1 An adaptation of Weick's depiction of the Thorngate's postulate of Theoretical Simplicity*

As explained earlier, most previous attempts to quantitatively explain the phenomenon of WOM dissemination tended to have a general view. While this tendency satisfied the need for generality and accuracy, it nevertheless undermined the need for simplicity. This is evident in the number of WOM predictors of which most previous WOM models are comprised. Following decades of research on WOM in which a significant amount of understanding has been gained, the current research argues that the time is ripe for theorising on this topic to follow a more accurate and more simple approach. Given the difficulty that still attends the prediction and stimulation of positive WOM dissemination, it is argued here that tackling this difficulty lies perhaps in the sacrifice of the generality characteristic. One way to reach that goal is to delineate a number of positive WOM dissemination categories, each of which can be explained by a different set of variables.

Such an endeavour could possibly be a first step toward resolving the apparent disagreement between previous WOM dissemination models as to which WOM predictor is the most salient. More specifically, the re-organisation of the current understanding of WOM dissemination called for in this thesis could possibly provide insight into the circumstances in which variables such as helping and expectations are the primary predictors of positive WOM dissemination. Exceeding expectations was found to be the primary predictor of WOM dissemination in hedonic consumption; whereas wanting to help was found to be the primary predictor of WOM dissemination in utilitarian consumption. Given the monovalent nature of hedonic consumption and the bivalent nature of utilitarian consumption, this finding seems to indicate that marketers of hedonic products have more opportunities to exceed consumers' expectations than marketers of utilitarian products; an implication that was also noted by Vogt (2013) and Chitturi et al. (2007). This is so because hedonic consumption can bring about either a gain or a mere lack of gain, whereas utilitarian consumption can result in either a loss or an avoidance of loss. Therefore, consumers in the former type of consumption tend to have an inclination to explore, be open to new experiences, and have ever-developing expectations, whereas those in the latter tend to be more analytical and have a stable level of expectations.

## **6.4 Practical implications**

The main practical implication that can be drawn from the results of the current research is strengthening the capability of marketing professionals to predict and stimulate consumers' tendency to voluntarily generate positive WOM messages after consumption. This advantage is gained through a number of ways. One is the identification of positive WOM predictors that are situational in nature as opposed to dispositional. In comparison to dispositions and personality traits, situational constructs are less difficult to shape and change by others, and therefore are more susceptible to external influence (Assael et al., 2007). In the context of WOM dissemination therefore, constructs such as consumers' expectations and their willingness to help are argued to be more amenable to marketers' influence than dispositional constructs such as self-enhancement or interpersonal relationships. The former are confined to a specific situation that occurs in a limited time span and they might not match people's preferences or their self-identity. On the contrary, the latter are not triggered by specific situations and they are always in harmony with people's preferences and self-identity.

Given the fact that consumers' WOM occurs mostly in their private lives and is therefore shielded from external monitoring and intervention, situational constructs constitute an important tool that marketers could rely on to predict and stimulate this behaviour. More specifically, unsolicited post-consumption WOM can be stimulated by gauging and then exceeding consumers' pre-consumption expectations. It can also be stimulated by inducing situations in which consumers would want to help other consumers through the provision of information. Marketers can contribute to the orchestration of such circumstances by deliberately aiming to widen the knowledge gap between different segments of their target customers, namely between influential consumers and those who follow them. This could be achieved through advertising campaigns that are targeted primarily at influential consumers and in which "inside" information about a product and its use is communicated.

Orchestrating this knowledge gap would create a need for information and for help in one consumer segment that needs the product but is not aware of it or does not know how to use it; at the same time, this gap would give another consumer segment the ability to provide that help. Targeting influential consumers with advertisements that are particularly designed to them as a way to stimulate their positive WOM seems to be different from the traditional ways of leveraging these influentials. Traditionally, the targeting of opinion leaders involves methods that seem direct and apparent such as providing them with free product samples or building a close relationship with them. The targeting suggested here differs from these traditional ways in the sense that it has a slight degree of subtlety. Additionally, creating this gap between influentials and their followers could be particularly useful when the level of product complexity is high (Smith & Vogt, 1995). This implies that as complexity of utilitarian products decreases, their unsolicited post-consumption WOM potential also decreases.

Moreover, the capability of marketers to predict and influence consumers' unsolicited post-consumption WOM dissemination is further enhanced by the conditions of hedonic and utilitarian types of consumption. Stimulating consumers' WOM by exceeding their expectations is more effective in hedonic consumption, whereas in utilitarian consumption, WOM is more effectively influenced by orchestrating and exploiting the knowledge gap between influential consumers and their followers. Thus, marketers of hedonic products who want to stimulate consumers' voluntary WOM in their sales should perhaps focus primarily on exceeding the expectations of their target customers. Alternatively, marketers

of utilitarian products should focus their efforts on identifying influential consumers and on providing them with product information that is communicated exclusively to them. Other practical benefits that marketing professionals gain from the proposed framework are simplicity and efficiency. Splitting the phenomenon of WOM dissemination into three different categories resulted in a different set of predictors for each category. This reduced the number of predictors of each category and simplified the prediction. Being able to efficiently predict this phenomenon with fewer predictors should result in a more efficient market research process in terms of collecting and analysing consumers' data.

## **6.5 Future research opportunities**

Following the empirical results reported in this thesis, a number of future research opportunities can be identified. One opportunity is to use non-parametric techniques to analyse the data collected in the current research without removing outliers. Further, the empirical testing conducted in the current research needs to be repeated after replacing the WOM ratio scale with a rating scale to ascertain whether this change will result in a more normally distributed dataset. On a related note, a study is needed to investigate any possible differences between measuring WOM that occurred recently and in a limited and short period of time and WOM that occurred over a prolonged period of time. As alluded to earlier, it is possible that measurement of the former would be more valid and applicable using a ratio scale, while the latter type of WOM would be more validly measured with a rating scale. Such a study could also shed light on any inconsistencies in previous findings about WOM dissemination. Specifically, can these inconsistencies be attributed to the mismatch between the type of scale used in measuring WOM and the time frame in which WOM was generated?

The empirical investigation within this thesis covered only a portion of the proposed framework. Future research is also needed to test the parts that have not been tested. This includes the conditioning effects of consumer involvement, self-enhancement, and interpersonal relationships in the prediction of disseminating unsolicited post-consumption WOM. It also includes testing the predictions of the other two proposed WOM categories, namely disseminating unsolicited pre-consumption WOM and disseminating solicited WOM, and the variables that condition and moderate these predictions. Further, in addition to testing the propositions and hypotheses posited here using a correlational research design,

the viability of testing them experimentally could also be explored in future research. In this regard, a between-group experimental design to manipulate WOM predictors would be particularly useful in preventing any biased responses as a result of how the measurements are ordered in the research instrument. Additionally, a between-group experimental design in which hedonic and utilitarian aspects of consumption are manipulated could also make it less cumbersome to measure these two and use the measures as manipulation checks.

Moreover, research is needed to explore and analyse any conceptual and operational differences between the three categories of WOM dissemination. While the current empirical testing focused solely on one WOM category, comparative analysis between the three categories is needed. Specific questions that are of interest in this theme include whether these categories should be treated as independent concepts. What are, if any, the distinctive ontological properties of each category? Does positive post-consumption WOM involve, for example, an aspect of explicit advocacy and recommendation, whilst positive pre-consumption WOM does not go beyond mere endorsement be it implicit or explicit? Do the WOM categories differ in terms of their operational definitions and measurements and how? Can one find empirical evidence that each category has a different set of predictors that is not shared with the other categories? SEM seems to be an appropriate approach through which answers to some of these questions could be found.

Furthermore, academic studies focusing on the practical implications of the results are needed. Such studies could delineate the parameters within which these implications can be implemented. For example, they could determine the extent by which consumers' hedonic expectations can be optimally exceeded and whether this exceeding should be done in terms of quantity or quality. They could also investigate the trade-off between the WOM benefits possibly gained from targeting influential consumers with exclusive advertisements about utilitarian products and those gained from mass advertisements in terms of brand awareness.



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## Appendix A

### Research Instrument

Thank you for your participation in this survey  
This survey is voluntary. The information you provide is anonymous and confidential.

#### **Voluntary positive word of mouth (WOM)**

This survey focuses on your word of mouth (WOM) activities as a consumer. WOM refers to the things you say about a product or a service.

WOM can be voluntary or it can be asked for. WOM is **voluntary** when:

- You talk about a product or a service without anyone asking you about it.
- It also means that you talk about a product or a service for free. In other words, you do not receive any benefits (monetary or otherwise) from the company producing that product or service in exchange for you talking about it.

**Asked-for** WOM refers to the things you say about a product or a service only after someone asked you about it.

WOM can also be positive or negative. Positive WOM reflects the good experience a consumer had with a product or a service. Negative WOM reflects the bad experience a consumer had with a product or a service.

This survey focuses only on your **voluntary positive WOM**.

The survey consists of four sections. You will be asked to select some products or services that you have purchased in the past. Then, you will be asked a number of questions related to the voluntary and positive things you said to other people about those products or services you selected. Also, you will be asked about your experience with consuming those products or services.

This survey would take approximately 10 - 15 minutes to complete.

Completion of the survey is considered consent to participate in the study and to publication of the aggregate results of the study with the understanding that anonymity and confidentiality will be preserved. All data will remain confidential to Lincoln University researchers. This research is funded by Lincoln University, New Zealand.

What is your age?

- ☐ 18 - 22 years    ☐ 38 - 42 years    ☐ 58 - 62 years  
☐ 23 - 27 years    ☐ 43 - 47 years    ☐ 63 - 67 years  
☐ 28 - 32 years    ☐ 48 - 52 years    ☐ 68 years +  
☐ 33 - 37 years    ☐ 53 - 57 years    ☐ I respectfully decline

What is your gender?

- ☐ Female ☐ Male

What is your highest level of education?

- Post-graduate College or University Degree
- Under-graduate College or University Degree
- Career or Technical Education
- High School
- Other (please specify)

What is your occupation?

----- End of Section and Page One of the questionnaire -----

Anything we buy can be described as either **Hedonic**, **Utilitarian**, or **Utilidonic**

Hedonic	something we buy for pleasure, fun, or leisure
Utilitarian	something we buy for necessity or practicality
Utilidonic	something we buy for <b>BOTH</b> necessity <b>AND</b> pleasure

Using the above definition of **Hedonic**, please think of something you have purchased in the past that is **NOT** utilitarian and **NOT** utilidonic, and that you **voluntarily** said positive things about it to **at least one person**.

What is the product or service you selected?

Approximately, how many times have you voluntarily said positive things to others about this product or service after you purchased it? (Please answer with a number)

**Hedonic choice:** ( )<sup>1</sup>

You voluntarily said positive things about this product or service ( ) times.

Out of those ( )<sup>2</sup>times, how many times did you use strong words? (Please answer with a number)

Out of those ( )**Error! Bookmark not defined.**times, how many times did you advise other people to buy this product or service? (Please answer with a number)

Out of those ( )**Error! Bookmark not defined.** times, how many times did you include detailed information? (Please answer with a number)

Please rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

- Saying positive things about this product or service reflects well on me
- Most people I talk to do not know much about this product or service
- I want to improve the well-being of other people by praising this product or service
- Praising this product or service makes people regard me as knowledgeable

---

<sup>1</sup>Using the Qualtrics software, a logic was set in this part of the questionnaire to display the product that the respondent selected in an answer to a previous question.

<sup>2</sup>Using the Qualtrics software, a logic was set in this part of the questionnaire to display the number of times the respondent said positive things about the selected product.

- I say positive things about this product or service because I want to give people the opportunity to make the right purchase decision
- I praise this product or service because I want to help others

Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Somewhat Disagree – Neither Agree nor Disagree – Somewhat Agree – Agree – Strongly Agree

How much did your experience with this product or service compare with the expectations you had prior to purchase in regards to the following three issues:

- purchase experience  
(this includes the interaction you had with the seller, and the overall atmosphere of the place or the website where you bought this product or service)
- value for money
- consumption / usage experience

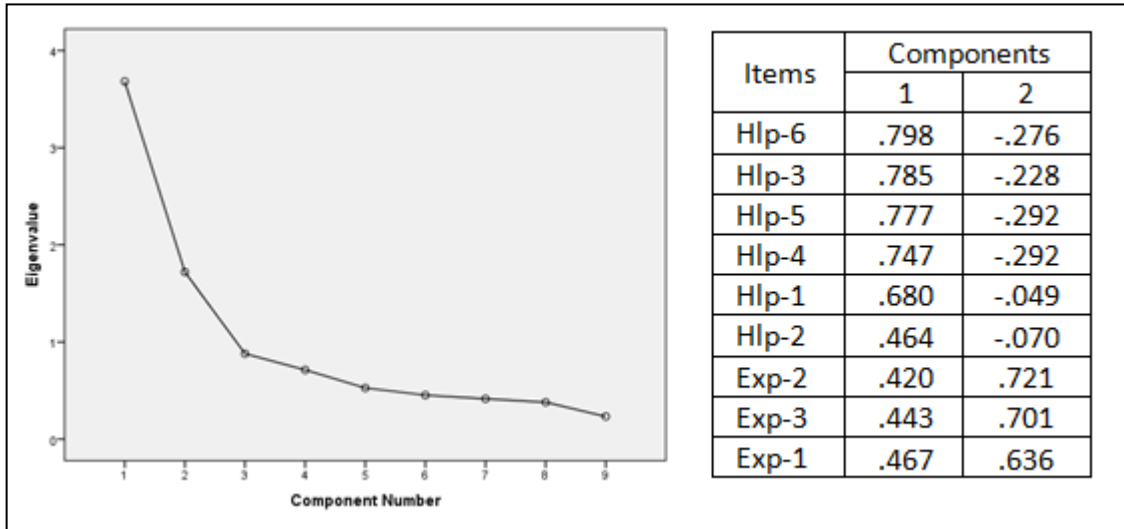
much less than I expected, but still acceptable – less than I expected, but still acceptable – as I expected – better than I expected – much better than I expected

**----- End of Section and Page Two of the questionnaire -----**

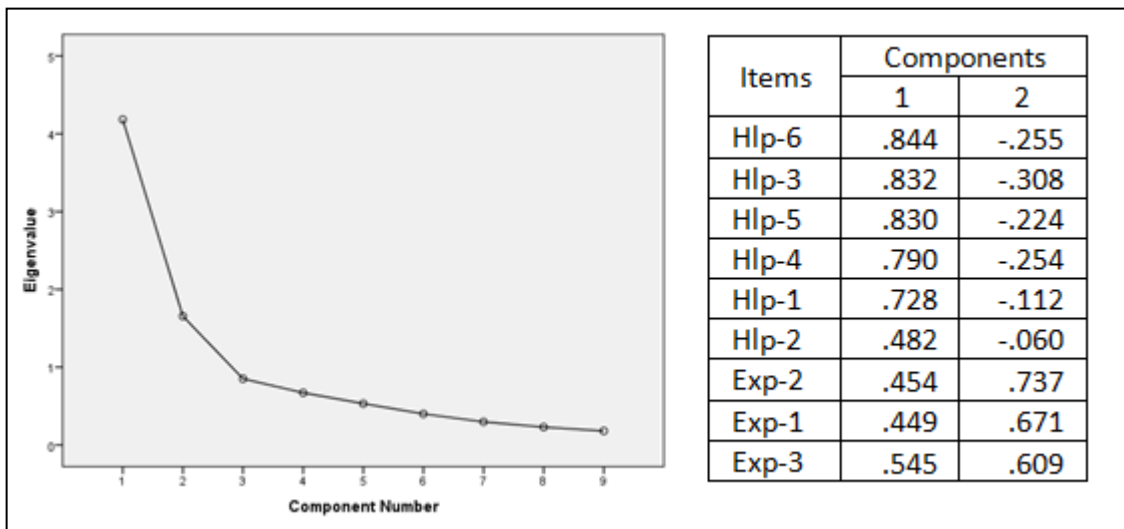
In Sections Three and Four of the questionnaire, similar instructions and questions to the ones for the hedonic type of consumption were provided respectively for the utilitarian and utilitarian types.



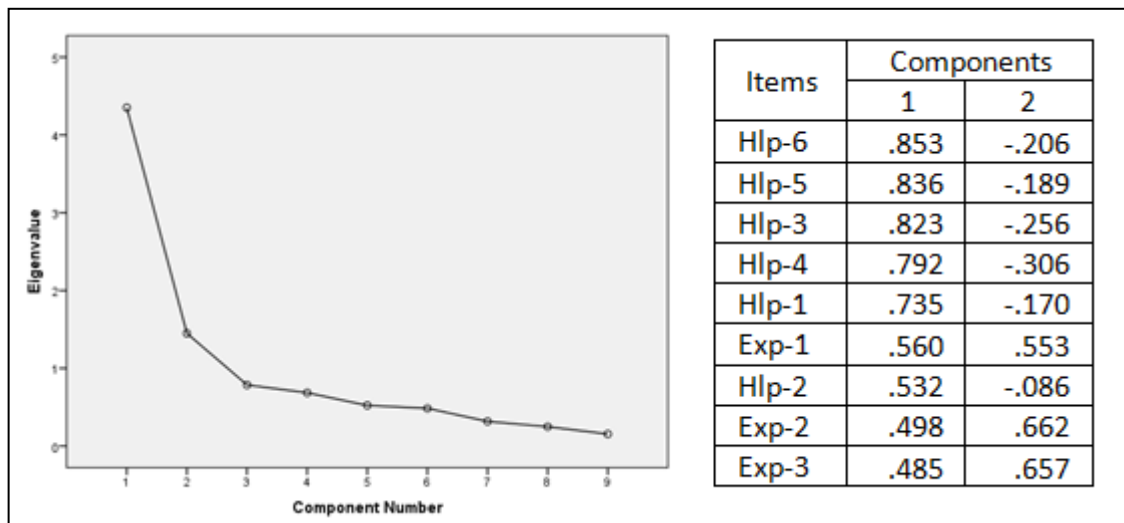
## Appendices B-1 to B-3



Appendix B-1 Scree plot (left) and unrotated loadings (right) for the hedonic dataset

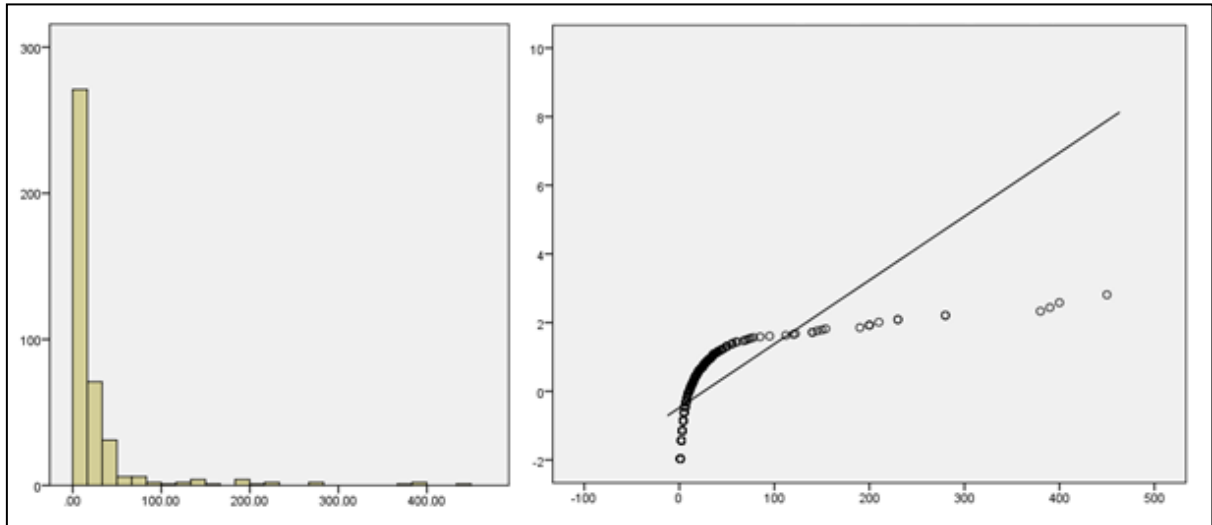


Appendix B-2 Scree plot (left) and unrotated loadings (right) for the utilitarian dataset

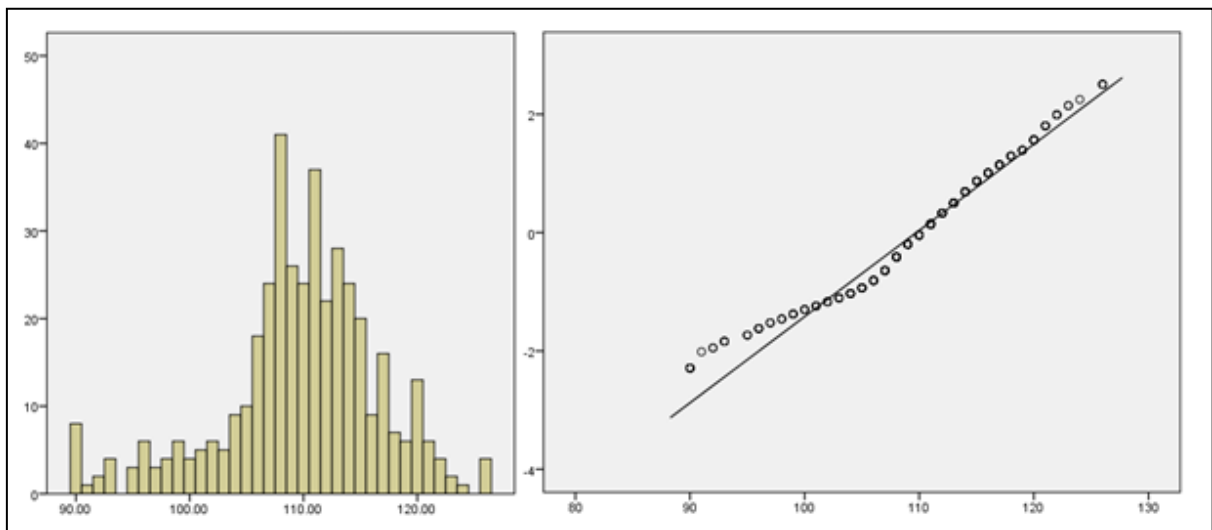


Appendix B-3 Scree plot (left) and unrotated loadings (right) for the utilitarian dataset

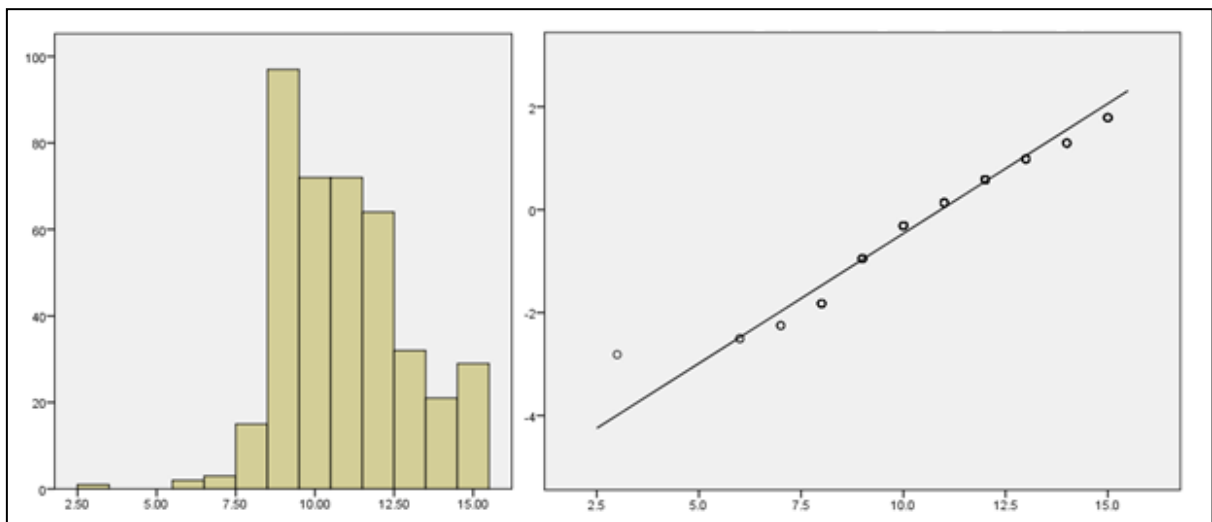
## Appendices C-1 to C-9



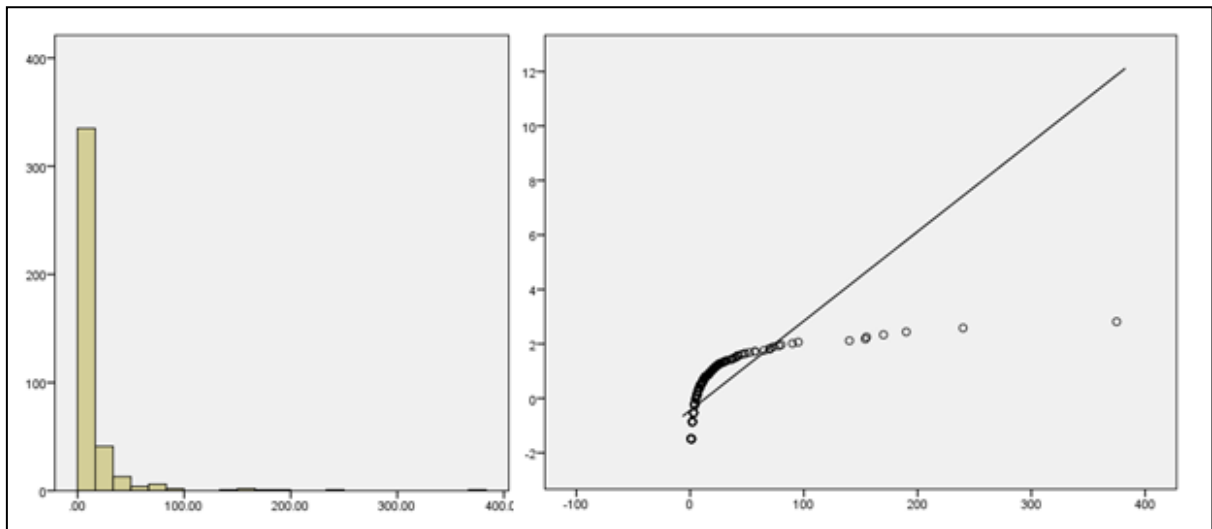
Appendix C-1 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of WOM dissemination scores in the hedonic dataset



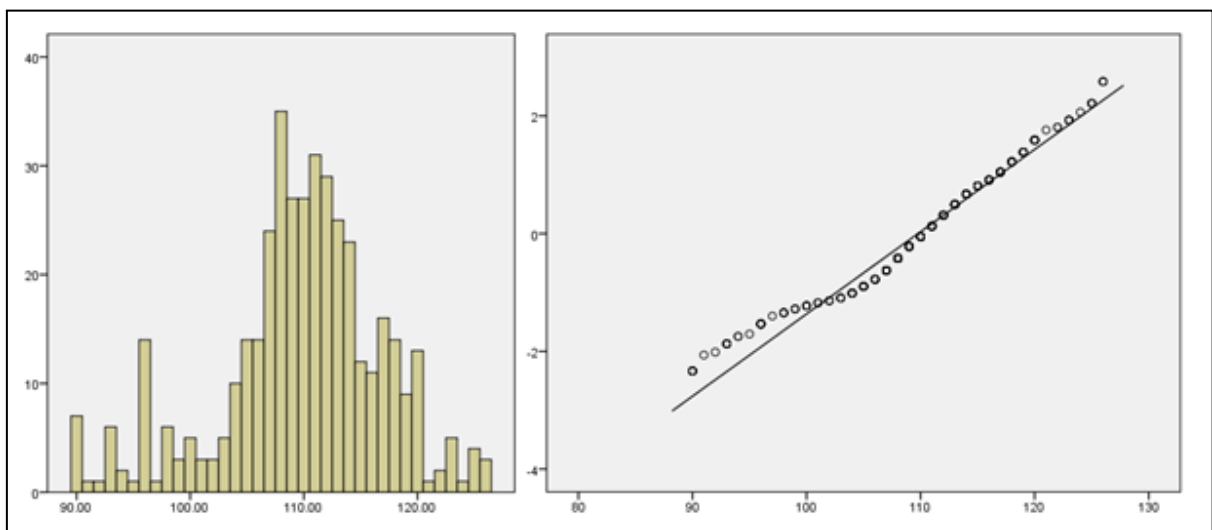
Appendix C-2 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of wanting to help scores in the hedonic dataset



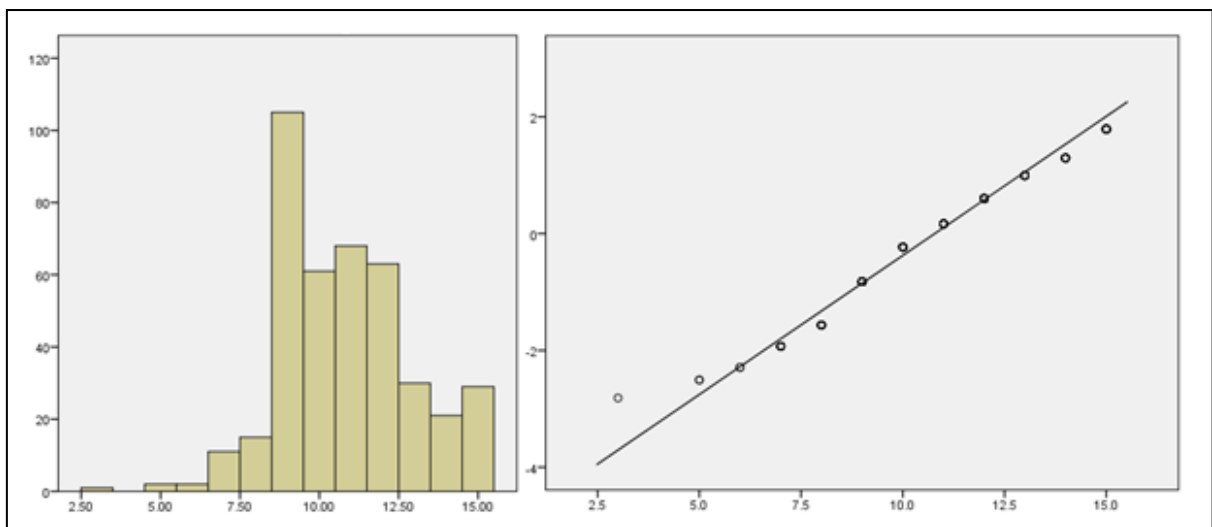
Appendix C-3 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of exceeding expectations scores in the hedonic dataset



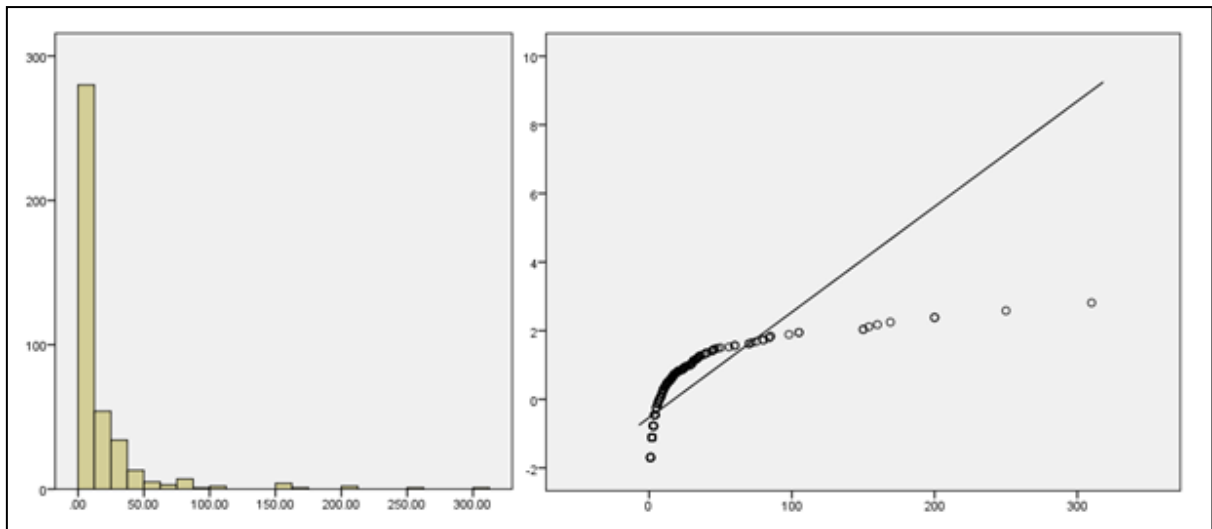
Appendix C-4 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of WOM dissemination scores in the utilitarian dataset



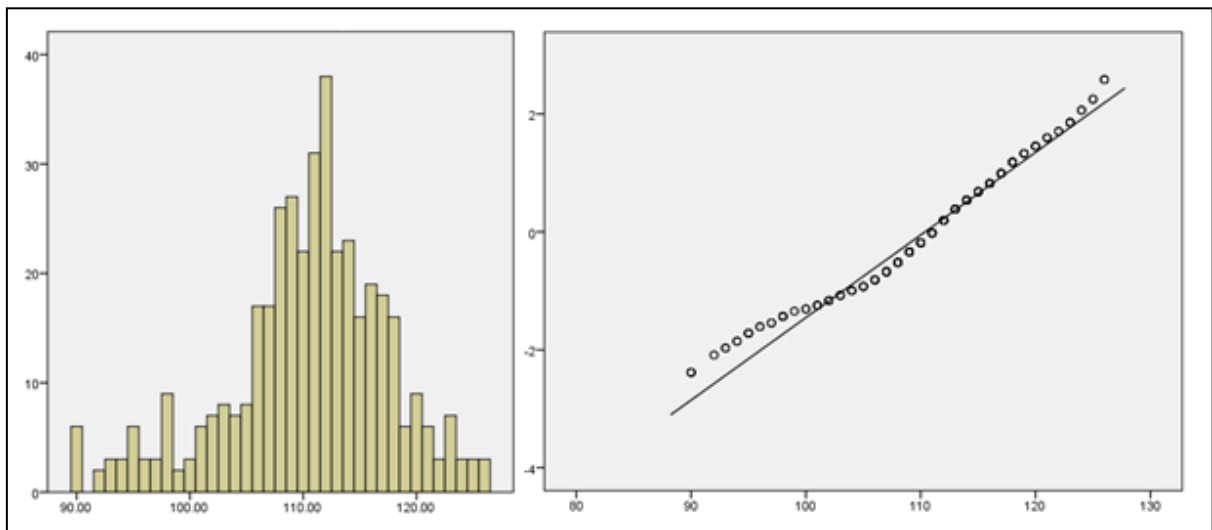
Appendix C-5 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of wanting to help scores in the utilitarian dataset



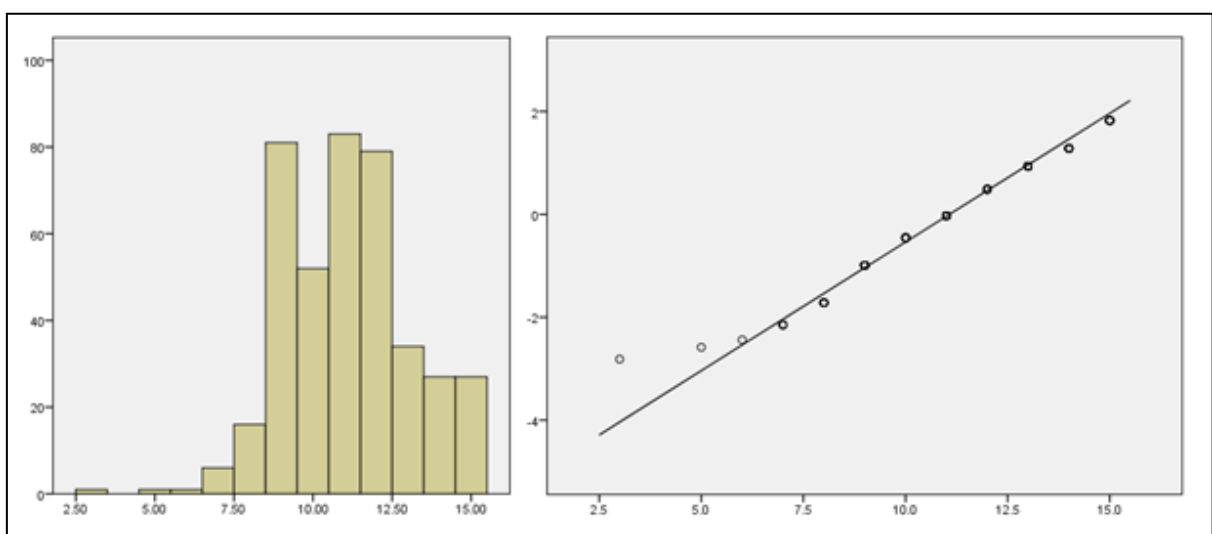
Appendix C-6 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of exceeding expectations scores in the utilitarian dataset



Appendix C-7 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of WOM dissemination scores in the utilidonic dataset

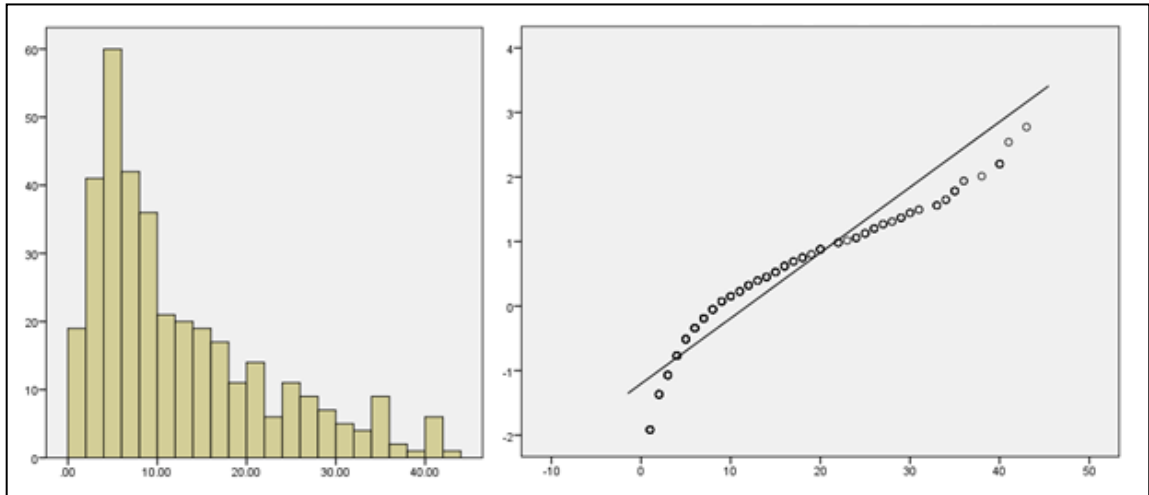


Appendix C-8 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of wanting to help scores in the utilidonic dataset

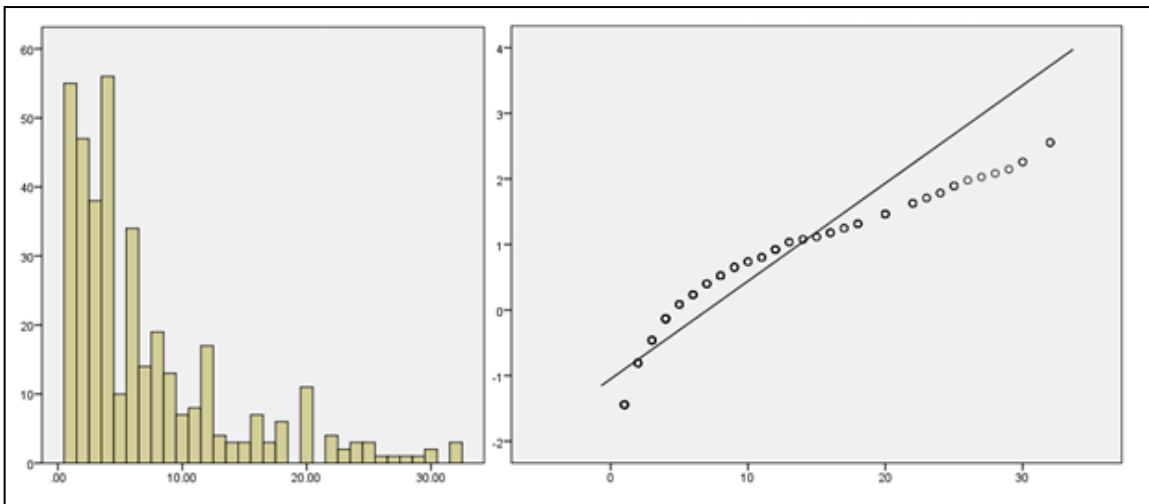


Appendix C-9 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of exceeding expectations scores in the utilidonic dataset

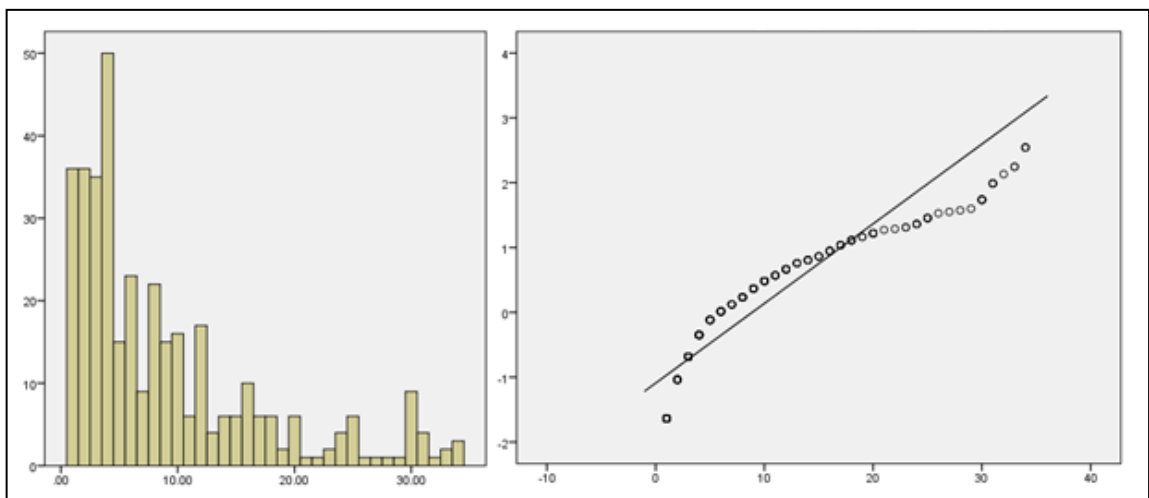
## Appendices D-1 to D-7



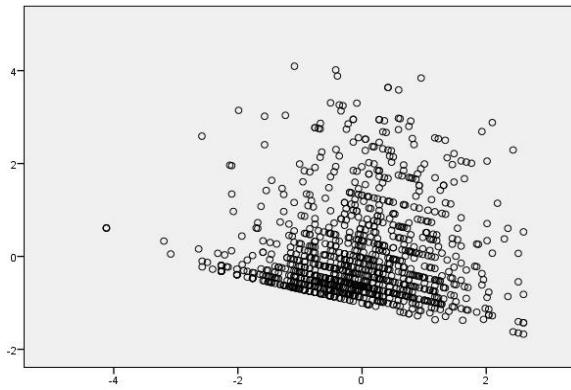
Appendix D-1 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of WOM dissemination scores in the hedonic dataset after applying the first solution



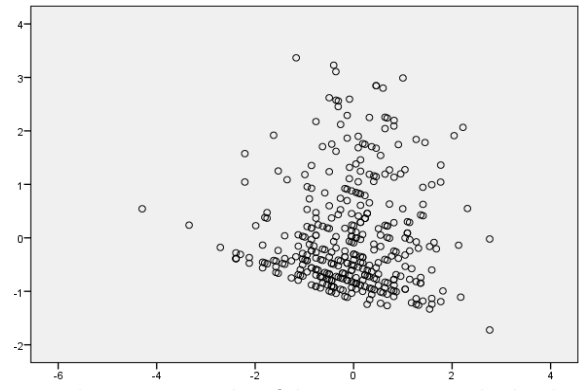
Appendix D-2 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of WOM dissemination scores in the utilitarian dataset after applying the first solution



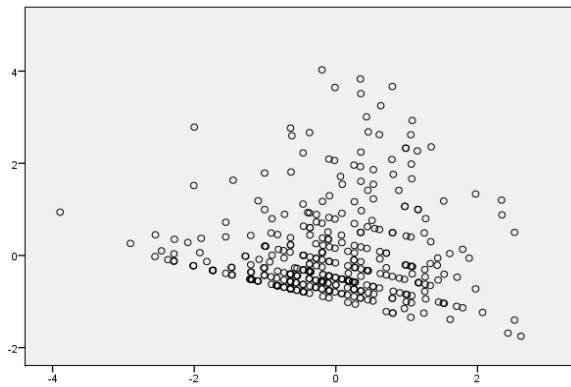
Appendix D-3 Histogram (left) and normal probability plot (right) of WOM dissemination scores in the utilidonic dataset after applying the first solution



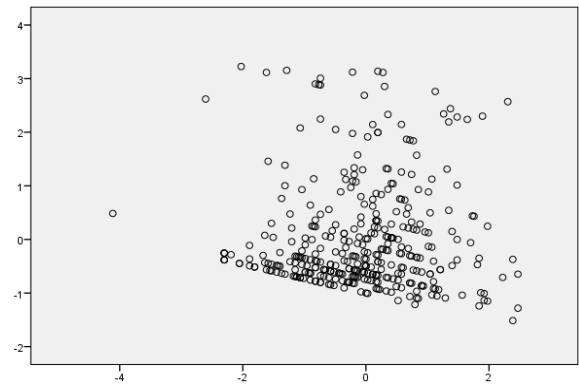
*Appendix D-4 Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the pooled dataset after applying the first solution*



*Appendix D-5 Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the hedonic dataset after applying the first solution*

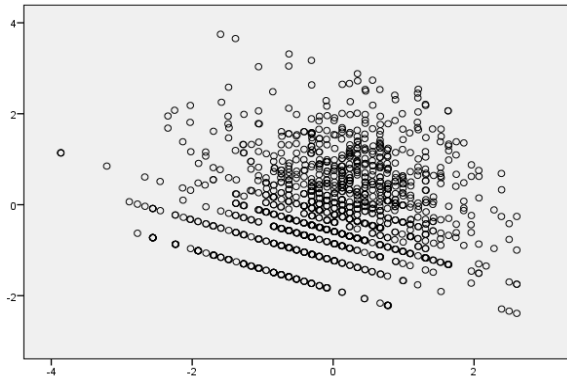


*Appendix D-6 Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the utilitarian dataset after applying the first solution*

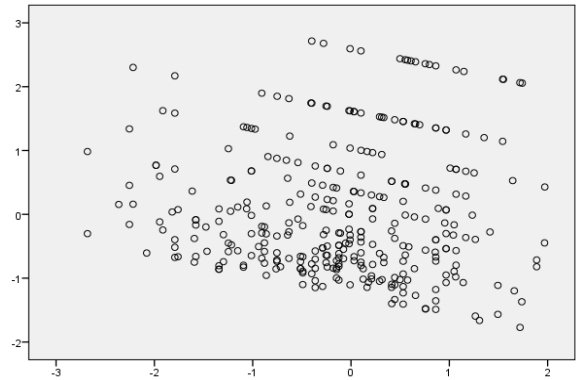


*Appendix D-7 Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the utilitarian dataset after applying the first solution*

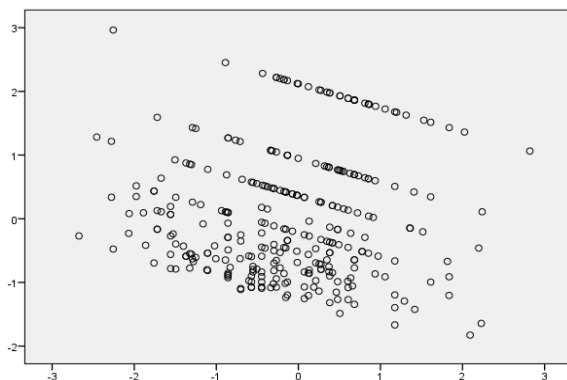
## Appendices E-1 to E-4



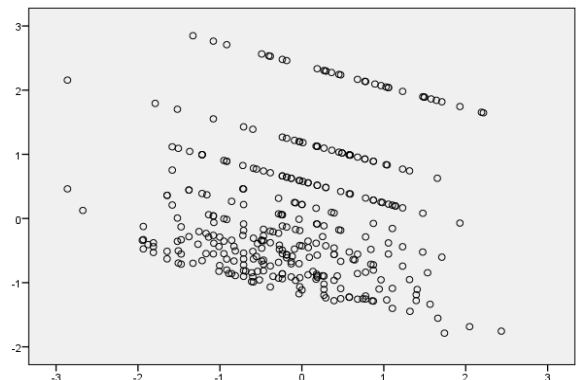
*Appendix E-1 Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the pooled dataset after transformation*



*Appendix E-2 Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the hedonic dataset after transformation*

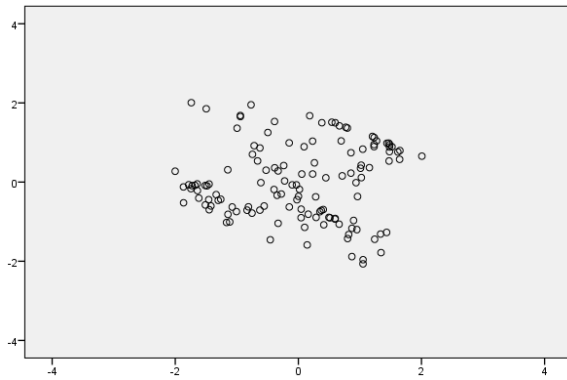


*Appendix E-3 Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the utilitarian dataset after transformation*

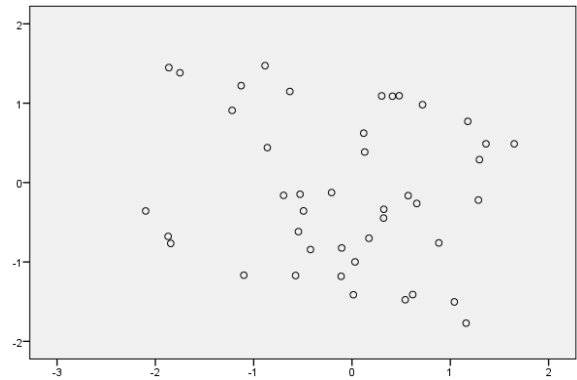


*Appendix E-4 Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the utilidonic dataset after transformation*

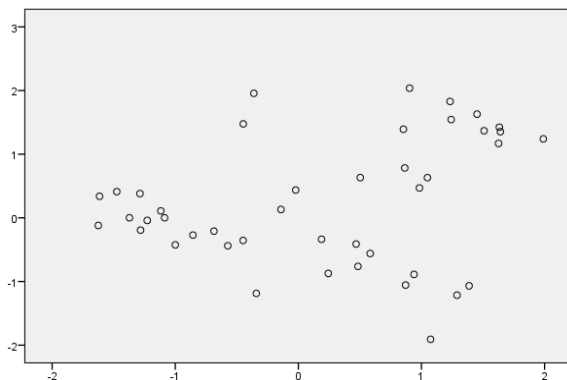
## Appendices F-1 to F-4



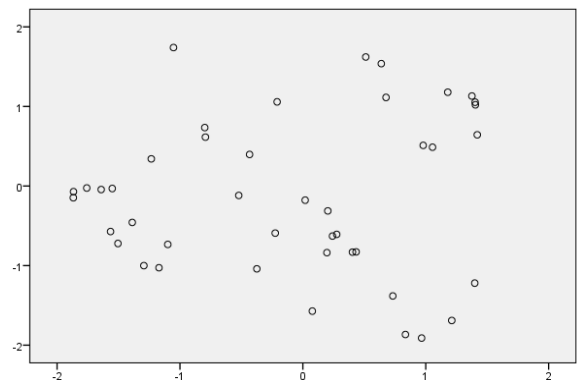
*Appendix F-1* Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the pooled dataset after standardisation



*Appendix F-2* Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the hedonic dataset after standardisation



*Appendix F-3* Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the utilitarian dataset after standardisation



*Appendix F-4* Scatter plot of the regression standardised residual for the utilidonic dataset after standardisation